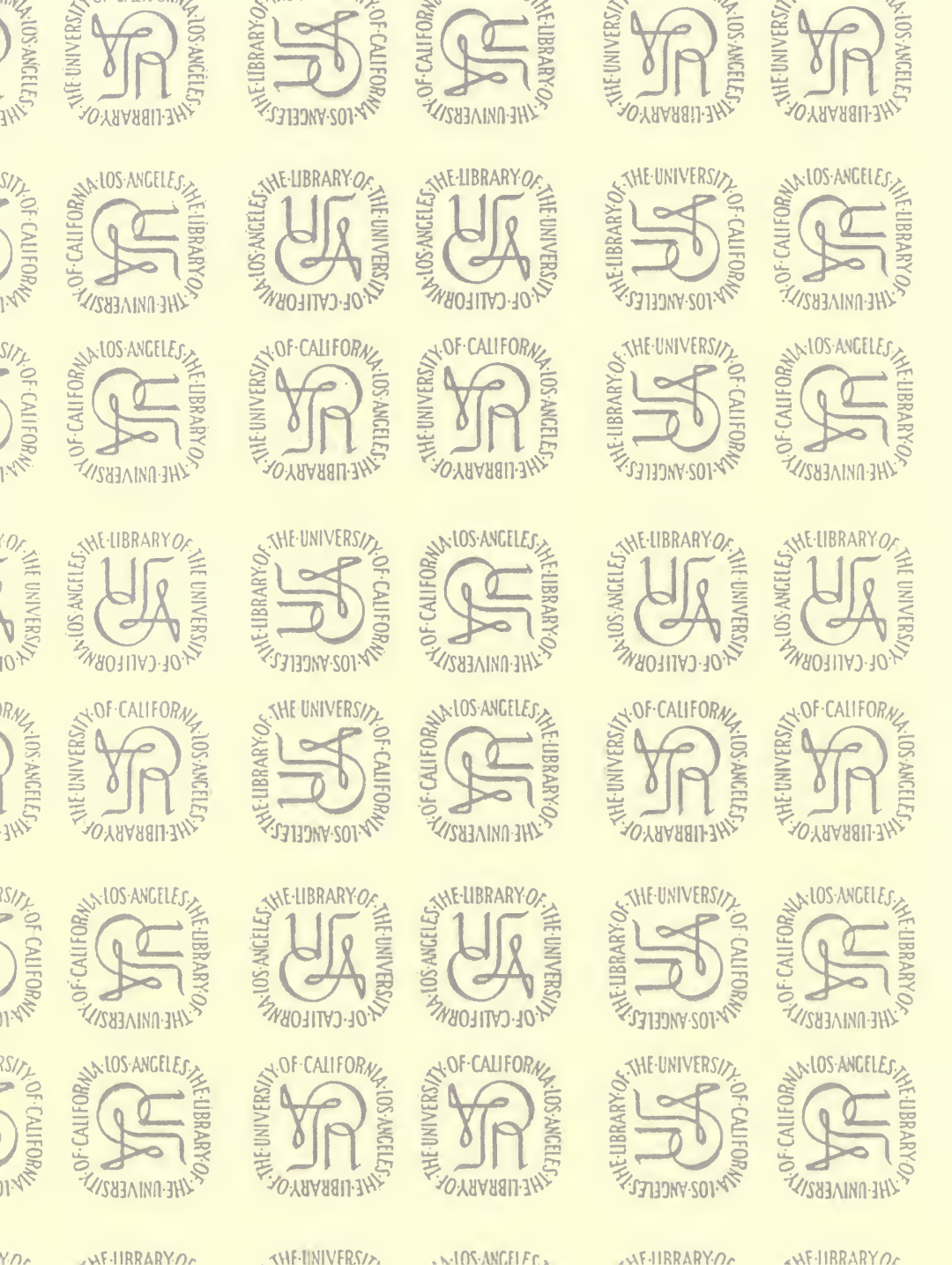


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AN
HISTORICAL VIEW
OF
CHRISTIANITY;

CONTAINING
SELECT PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE;

WITH
A COMMENTARY

BY THE LATE
EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.

AND NOTES BY
THE LATE LORD VISCOUNT BOLINGBROKE,
MONSIEUR DE VOLTAIRE,
AND OTHERS.

THERE SHALL COME IN THE LAST DAYS SCOFFERS, WALKING
AFTER THEIR OWN LUSTS; AND SAYING, WHERE IS THE
PROMISE OF HIS COMING? II Peter, iii. 3.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND.

1806.

154048

NOTICE TO THE READER.

THE Editor has no difficulty in offering to the public the ensuing Commentary, as the genuine work of MR. GIBBON; not confiding, however, so much on the peculiarity of his style, as on the circumstance of the whole of it having been at one period or another, inserted in different parts of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: a circumstance, which supplies a species of evidence not to be controverted, without imputing to him the most improbable and unparalleled plagiarism. In a note to the fifth Chapter, the reader will find a reference to the pages of Mr. Gibbon's History.—The present publication is offered as a specimen of a more extended work, there remaining in the Editor's hands a large part of the Commentary, of which, as well as of the present publication, correct copies will be left with the publishers, for the perusal of the curious. The Notes from Monsieur de *Voltaire*, Lord *Bolingbroke*, Mr. *Hume*, and others, are selected for the purpose of shewing where they have been consulted by Mr. GIBBON, and how far their writings have contributed to corroborate his Evidence.—To those who interest themselves in the character of our great historian, it must be extremely gratifying, to behold him producing the most unequivocal and unexceptionable evidence in support of Revelation.—Of the Preface, the Editor does not presume to assert, that it is the composition of MR. GIBBON. It appears, however, to have been written as an Introduction to his Commentary; and, if not by his pen, was probably the production of some friend, who had as much pleasure in seeing him among the Defenders of Christianity, as the Inhabitants of *Naioth* had in seeing SAUL among the Prophets. Without presuming to assert, or object to, its authenticity, the Editor submits the question entirely to the critical acumen, and superior judgment of the reader.

25th March, 1806.

BR
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G35h

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P R E F A C E.

THE annals of the Roman empire are intimately and indissolubly connected with the history of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION. They supply evidence in support of revelation, and record facts, which the *pagan* or *infidel* historian could have had no inducement to invent or embellish. The object of the present work, is to offer an example of the *manner*, in which the Scripture might be illustrated and confirmed by reference to profane history: and, whatever observation the reader may be disposed to make on the ensuing commentary, he may be assured it was not written under a peculiar bias or predilection in favour of revelation.

On the evidence of revelation.

In order to appreciate correctly the circumstances which will be submitted to the reader, it may be necessary first to consider the nature and *degree* of evidence, which, but with

Previous inquiry.

deference and deep humility, we may suppose would be offered by the CREATOR to his rational and accountable creatures, upon the promulgation of his divine will. When the design of revelation is to produce *practical virtue*, and not merely to disseminate *philosophical truth*, that degree of evidence will, it should seem, be most useful, which is best calculated to afford exercise to the moral faculties, to impress the doctrines of revelation permanently on the mind, and to form and bring into action virtuous and religious habits.

Views of immortality.

IMMORTALITY opens an unbounded scope to our hopes and fears. We feel a capacity of intense misery and happiness; and we have no means of ascertaining, to what degree that capacity may be extended. We also feel a necessary connection with the past and the future: but how we are, or how we may hereafter be, connected with the distant parts of the universe, is to us unknown. In the gradual unfolding of the mysterious scheme of Providence, from the beginning to the end of things, we have the greatest possible interest. It may well be our desire to know it: but while our faculties cannot even investigate the constitution * of the natural world, we can hardly expect to comprehend fully the mysteries of the

* VOLTAIRE.—Quelqu'un a-t-il jamais pu dire précisément, comment une buche se change dans son foyer en charbon ardent, et par quelle mécanique la chaux s'enflamme avec de l'eau fraîche? Le premier principe du mouvement du cœur dans les animaux est-il bien connu? Sait-on bien nettement comment la génération s'opère? A-t-on deviné ce qui nous donne les sensations, les idées, la mémoire? Nous ne connaissons pas plus l'essence de la matière, que les enfans qui en touchent la superficie. Qui nous apprendra par quelle mécanique ce grain de blé que nous jettons en terre se relève pour produire un tuyau chargé d'un épi; et comment le même sol produit une pomme au haut de cet arbre, et un chataigne à l'arbre voisin? *Questions, &c. sur les Bornes de l'Esprit Humain.*

invisible

invisible works of God, and the plan of redemption by the Christian dispensation. The evidence by which it is proved, and the duties which it enjoins, may be perfectly within our power, and within the comprehension of every man; and yet the motive, the plan, and the means, may remain an inscrutable mystery.

IN our progress from one period of life to another, the mind and body successively acquire the habits and qualifications, which are necessary for enjoyment. In instances in which these faculties have not been acquired, or where, by any defect of body or intellect, they have been lost, the individual possesses no power of enjoyment; and has therefore no sphere of action, nor any interest or pleasure in the objects around him. So in a future life, without some faculty, character, or qualification, adapted to the objects of fruition, there must be an absolute incapacity of happiness. If the mind is not purified and ameliorated in its passage through life, if character is depraved, and talent unimproved, the soul must be incapable of *moral* and *spiritual* pleasure: It cannot be susceptible of gratification in an *intellectual state*, where the degree of happiness will be proportional to the capacity of enjoyment.

Preparation
for happiness.

THE present life is a state of sensation and reflection, united or alternate; that of reflection only, when elevated and unmixed, being frequently a condition of very great happiness*; and

Powers of
reflection.

* WE are frequently surprised to see persons easy and contented, with considerable bodily defects and inconveniences, and sometimes even happier than they had been in prosperity and health. The soul, indeed, is gratified and inconvenienced by corporeal and worldly circumstances; but experience shows, in a thousand instances, that ITS HAPPINESS IS NOT ENTIRELY GOVERNED BY THEM, or wholly in their power. The bodily frame is only the *present residence* of the soul; and if that residence is incommodious, or in

Intellectual
improvement.

and, when embittered by guilt and remorse, a period of such intense and insupportable misery, as to be sometimes the cause of despair and suicide. When the soul is emancipated from the body, it may be presumed that, according to the degree in which it has improved its moral and intellectual faculties in this life, it will enjoy, in a future state, these and other talents of a spiritual nature, with so great an increase*, and in so exalted a degree, as to constitute the most transcendent happiness. We know that by the cultivation of our intellectual faculties, the powers and pleasures of reflection may be greatly increased; and that, by indolence, and by indulgence in sensuality, the intellect may be so debased, and the heart so depraved, that the sufferer shall be reduced to a state of *mere animal appetite*, like that of the most abject of the bruté creation; and be driven to the grossest and most disgusting acts of sensuality †, in the vain attempt to avoid a state of reflection. From this we deduce, that they who by criminal, sinful, or sensual habits, vitiate their moral feelings, and debase their intellectual powers, will be incapable of enjoyment in a state of reflection; and that, as the contemplation of moral improvement and happiness will always be a source of

bad repair, we may say, *ANIMUS MALE HABITAT*, The habitation of the soul is not convenient. E.

* THIS is confirmed by the parable, Matth. xxv. 14. Those who improved the talents intrusted to them, received additional endowments; while they who neglected their improvement, lost even what had been originally bestowed on them. E.

† TACITUS has given, with the hand of a master, a picture of this beastly and sensual depravity, in the fourth book of his history. *At Vitellius—umbraculis hortorum abditus, ut ignava animalia, quibus si cibum suggeras, jacent, torpentque—præterita, instantia, futura, pari oblivione dimiserat.* The sties of CIRCE could produce nothing more brutal and debased. E.

pleasure

pleasure to the virtuous—so, to the wicked, the view of numbers of their fellow creatures, vicious and wretched in consequence of their influence, example, or neglect, must be the cause of great and lasting misery in a future state. The sad effects of their own wilful misconduct, and the extent of vice and misery which they have disseminated in the world, may probably form a part of their punishment; a punishment greatly aggravated by the regret, that they did not actively, and in proportion to the means they enjoyed, contribute to the virtue and happiness of their fellow creatures *.

THESE observations will apply to the feelings of every individual. They are also applicable to states and empires. The history of the world has shewn, in a succession of great examples, that when sensuality is predominant, states and empires fall into decay and dissolution; while, on the contrary, they thrive and flourish in proportion to the cultivation of science, literature, and the higher order of the fine arts; and to the pre-

Its effect on
empires.

Roman
Empire

* THESE considerations will tend to show the expediency of laying in a stock of intellectual improvement, against OLD AGE; so that when the powers and enjoyments of *sensation* become enfeebled and diminished, those of *reflection* may be proportionably increased and strengthened. The attention will thus be engaged by new pleasures, while the soul is preparing for the enjoyment of a more elevated and permanent state of existence. With this impression, let us for a moment picture to ourselves the sad condition of an *old man*, earnestly coveting objects of sense, in proportion as

they recede from him, and as his means of *sensual gratification* are extinguished;—at the same time neglecting his powers of reflection, and the cultivation of those intellectual or moral faculties, which by a kind Providence were destined to supply, in the decline of life, *the increasing vacancy of animal enjoyment*. The cup of Tantalus affords but a faint image of the unceasing regret and vexation of that wretched man, who thus places all his desires and affections in what he has no capacity to enjoy, and what must be the perpetual source of sorrow and disappointment. E.

valence

valence of elevated and intellectual occupations. A view of the latter part of the Roman history will afford a continued exemplification of this truth, the evidence of which may be traced in the annals of all the preceding empires of the world. Of the causes of the decline and fall of imperial Rome, none was so important, or had so great an effect, as that pernicious error of the pagan mythology, which directed the influence of religion, and the example of their gods, to the promotion of sensuality and licentiousness; and, instead of a pure and intellectual Deity, proposed for their objects of worship, not merely imperfect creatures, of like vices and passions with themselves, but wretches, to whom was imputed every gross and detestable species of lust and immorality.—

Progress of
knowledge.

IN considering natural objects, we extend our reasoning from what we know, to that which is unknown; and, finding that the natural world, as far as our scope of comprehension extends, is subject to general laws, we infer that the whole universe is so governed. The same analogical inference from what we perceive of God's providence in visible and natural things, may be made to his government of the moral and invisible world: and may tend to explain to us (as far as our limited faculties are capable of receiving it) why a period of *time*, an intervention of *means*, and a *process* of operation, should have been adopted for the amendment and restoration of fallen man; and why there should be shades of *uncertainty* in the evidence, which God has condescended to afford us respecting the Christian dispensation.

Period and
process of
operation.

THE progressive operation of various means, takes up, in the natural world, a certain length of time, before the end can be accomplished. Vegetable and animal bodies make a gradual advancement to maturity; and rational beings form manners and

and characters, and acquire knowledge and experience, by a long series of action. Our existence is *successive*: one stage of life is a preparation for another. Thus, in the revelation of the will of God, as in the course of his natural providence, we may presume that by HIM, to whom “a thousand years are “as one day,” a progressive series of means, each subservient to and connected with the other, and all tending to promote the ultimate and permanent virtue and happiness * of his creatures, may have been extended through a succession of ages, beyond our view, and beyond our comprehension.

AGAIN—there is a degree of beauty and fitness in the gradation of ranks and classes in the moral, as well as in the natural world; all tending, though at an infinite distance, to the Divine perfection. THE POWER OF THE DEITY IS, INDEED, UNBOUNDED! He might have formed man, at first, a pure, enlightened, and ethereal spirit, of the highest order of created beings. But that would not have been analogous to what we see of his government in this visible world: and, as far as our limited perception can extend, it would not have corresponded with the general system of the universe, that all

Order of beings.

* HUME.—The most perfect happiness, surely, must arise from the contemplation of the most perfect object. But what more perfect than beauty and virtue? And where is beauty to be found equal to that of the universe? Or virtue, which can be compared to the BENEVOLENCE and JUSTICE of the DEITY? If aught can diminish the pleasure of this contemplation, it must be either *the narrowness of our faculties*, which conceals from us the great-

est part of these beauties and perfections; or the shortness of our lives, which allows not time sufficient to instruct us in them. But it is our comfort, that if we employ worthily the faculties here assigned us, *they will be enlarged in another state of existence*, so as to render us more suitable worshipers of our Maker: And that THE TASK, WHICH CAN NEVER BE FINISHED IN TIME, WILL BE THE BUSINESS OF ETERNITY.—*The Platonist.*

rational

Handwritten note: *How the great
Cryer of Spain*

rational creatures should possess equal purity, perfection, and power; nor would it have been consistent with Divine justice, to give a superiority or preeminence to any being, except as the consequence of improvement in a state of trial.

Of moral responsibility,

SOME theorists, indeed, have applied the antiquated doctrine of *fatality* and *necessity* to the concerns of religion; as others have to natural things, and to the occurrences of common life. In the latter, however, we know that by the neglect of our worldly concerns we waste our fortune, and by inattention to health or to personal danger, we bring on disease and immature death. These lessons we are taught by early and daily experience. We constantly act under the conviction, that fatality and necessity will never protect from the consequence of negligence or folly. We see misery the attendant on vice, and we trace in a variety of instances, to their original sources of misconduct,—indigence, disease, infamy, and an untimely end. When, therefore, we find that our conduct here influences our present happiness and misery, we may well conclude that it will *govern* them in a future state: for it is not only analogous to the constitution of the natural world, but it is conformable to every idea which we can conceive of the DEITY, that he should reward virtue and punish vice*. What,

and the nature of sin.

* VOLTAIRE.—Newton était intimement persuadé de l'existence d'un DIEU; et il entendait, par ce mot, non seulement un être infini, tout puissant, éternel, et créateur, mais un MAÎTRE qui a mis *un relation entre lui et ses créatures*; car sans cette relation, la connaissance d'un Dieu n'est qu'une idée stérile, qui semblerait inviter au crime, par l'espoir de l'impunité, tout

raisonneur né pervers. Aussi ce grand philosophe fait un remarque singulière a la fin de ses Principes: C'est qu'on ne dit point, *Mon éternel, mon infini*, parce que ces attributs n'ont rien de relatif a notre nature; mais on dit, et on doit dire, MON DIEU; et par la il faut entendre le MAÎTRE et le CONSERVATEUR de notre vie, l'objet de nos pensées. *Elemens de Philosophie*.

then,

then, must we think of rational beings, the accountable creatures of God, presumptuously introducing confusion and misery into his created world ; blaspheming their Creator, contemning his authority, and applying the existence and talents which he has bestowed on them, in disseminating vice and misery among their fellow-creatures. Can we suppose it consistent with any principles of moral order, or analogous to the government of the natural world, that offenders, who have thus voluntarily alienated themselves from truth and virtue, should escape punishment ; much less that they should be objects of favour, except by the intervention of such means, as DIVINE WISDOM and MERCY may adopt, to atone for sin, to generate penitence, and to produce amendment of life.

THE doctrine of atonement for guilt is almost coeval with the creation. It is to be found in the history of every people, and in every religious institution, throughout the world. In a peculiar manner we trace it in every part of the Mosaic dispensation ; and that written evidence is wonderfully confirmed by the rites and ceremonies, which the Jews observe to this hour, in every part of the globe, over which they are miraculously scattered and dispersed.—But this is not all. The visible government which God has exercised over the natural world, has been through the *mediation* of others. We are brought into existence by the instrumentality of our parents. We are preserved in infancy, and instructed in youth, by them and others ; and they feel, in sickness and old age, the return of that care and attention. The whole creation displays a similar view of God's providence ; and such, if we judge by analogy, must be the government of the moral and invisible world. We receive good through the mediation of others ; who are, so far, the derivative and *mediatory* instruments of

Of atone-
ment and
mediation.

the mercy of God ; adapted to prepare the mind, and direct the contemplation, to that exalted and peculiar character, THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

Universality
of evidence.

It has however been alledged, that “ a clear light of revelation, equal and impartial, and spread over the whole world * at the same moment, with *irresistible* power, would have precluded scepticism, and have silenced objection. The infidel would have submitted to that evidence which he *could not* controvert ; and the pious convert would have rejoiced in the possession of a faith, calculated to purify the sensual, to fix the listless, and to soften the obdurate heart.”—To this it might be enough to answer generally, that such a revelation would not have been analogous to what we see of God’s government in the visible world. The radiance of solar heat and light is diffused over the earth, and the blessings of health and strength, the capacity of knowledge, the faculty of improvement, and other temporal advantages, are imparted by the CREATOR to his creatures, with a boundless and unsearchable variety ; and yet, as far as we can presume to penetrate into the works of creation, all these blessings and advantages are bestowed on the objects of his bounty, with perfect wisdom and propriety.

Whether
clear and ir-
resistible.

BESIDES this, it will be obvious, that a revelation, *clear and irresistible*, would not have been calculated to produce

* As to those nations in the world, to which the Christian dispensation has not been published, or where its light has been obscured, we have reason to believe, that they will be judged according to the advantages they have had. It cannot be presumed, that they will be responsible for the rejection of that evidence, which has never been offered to them. At the same time they may receive through sources impenetrable to us, the benefit of that full and sufficient *atonement*, which was *once* made for the sins of all mankind. —E.

AMENDMENT OF CHARACTER ; nor, as far as we can presume to judge, would it have been consistent with the highest notions we can form of Divine wisdom. If the evidence of revelation had been universal, clear, and irresistible, so as to have *forced* conviction upon the most incredulous, the reception of it without any act or exertion on our part, would have afforded no religious exercise * to the mind, and would have supplied no means of moral improvement. To distinguish its truth would have required no attention : to doubt it would have been absolutely impossible. To deny it, would be the same as to have denied the sun's existence, during the brightest meridian of summer. The probationary state of man, in this sublunary world, is calculated to produce mental and moral improvement ; improvement of the mind by religious and intellectual exercise, and of the heart by moral feelings and habits. An active solicitude about the TRUTH OF RELIGION, accompanied by a fair and impartial examination of its evidence, has the same beneficial influence on the mind, as the practice of religion has upon the heart. The same character and internal disposition, which *after conviction* will produce obedience to the precepts of revealed religion, will *lead* to a serious investigation of its evidence, when once offered to consideration. It is not the mere *knowledge* or *belief* of the doctrines of revelation, but the practice of its *duties*, that is

Of practical effects.

* " MANY serious persons seem to desire, and even to expect, *assurance*, in such a measure and degree, as is not suited to the present state. They would have FAITH and HOPE to be the same with SENSE.—They do not remember that it is true in this re-

spect as well as in many others, what the Apostle says, " Now we " see through a glass darkly, but then " face to face : now I know in part, " but then I shall know, even as I " am known." *Witherspoon on Regeneration.*

the

the desired object *. He, who from worldly motives omits or declines the examination of the proofs of revealed religion, might by the same impulse be driven to neglect the practice of it, if the conviction were pressed upon him, and not obtained as the result of his own free inquiry. Instances of this kind frequently occur in sacred history: they are not wanting in our own times. It is indeed obvious, that the same cause (the desire of indulging in vanity or sensuality) which prevents some men from seriously weighing the evidences of religion, diverts others, even when its truth has been forced on the mind, from the practice of its duties.

Nature of
evidence.

THE general evidence of Christianity has been within the reach of men, in every rank and situation of life, and of every degree of understanding. It will therefore be proper for those who mean to enter upon the inquiry with a fair and unprejudiced mind, previously to ascertain whether they have no *secret motives*, which may bias and pervert their judgments; and whether they are not desirous of evading moral obligation, and disposed so to live, as to make it adverse to their passions and propensities, that revelation should be true. Our obligations to inquire into the evidence of Christianity, and upon conviction of its truth to embrace it, are of the first order, and MORAL in the highest and most proper sense of the word. We may find things in Scripture, which we cannot *entirely* explain; but this is far from being a difficulty peculiar to revelation. The evidence, upon which we conduct ourselves in the common concerns of life, is frequently extremely doubtful

Duty of in-
quiry.

* If the mere *belief* of its doctrines constituted the *sum* of religion, and intitled the possessor to the palm of orthodoxy, without the collateral and essential proof of *good works*,—what shall we say of the claim of evil spirits, who not only *believe*, but *tremble*? E.

and

and uncertain. But this uncertainty does not prevent our weighing attentively the nature and degree of circumstance and motive ; and from doing that, which upon mature consideration, we deem to be most conducive to our personal welfare, or worldly concerns ; and surely it should not prevent us from showing the same attention to our greatest and most important interests, that we do to matters of a trivial and temporal nature.

THE evidence of Christianity * has been ably and fully discussed by several learned and eminent men. I shall not presume to enter into a general consideration of the subject. Before, however, I conclude this Preface, I shall venture to submit a few cursory observations on the nature of its doctrines, the authenticity of its miracles, and the confirmation afforded to prophecy by the present state of the civilized world.—THE PURE AND SPIRITUAL NATURE OF CHRISTIANITY constitutes a striking part of its intrinsic evidence, and distinguishes it from all the diversified systems of error

On the Christian doctrine.

Why is the miracle

* IN MR. WILBERFORCE'S excellent work on CHRISTIANITY, he states one argument, which has impressed his mind, and must impress every candid mind, with particular force. "This is the great *variety* of the *kinds* of evidence, which have been adduced in proof of Christianity, and the confirmation thereby afforded of its truth : the proof from prophecy—from miracles—from the character of Christ—from that of his apostles—from the nature of the doctrines of Christianity—from the excellence of her practical precepts—from the accordance between the

doctrinal and practical system of Christianity, whether considered each in itself, or in their mutual relations to each other—from other internal evidence, afforded in the more abundance, in proportion as the sacred records have been scrutinized with greater care—from the accounts of cotemporary or nearly cotemporary writers—and from the impossibility of accounting, on any other supposition than that of the truth of Christianity, for its promulgation and early prevalence." *Practical View*, pa. 372. sixth edition.

Heathen my-
thology.

Mahometan-
ism.

or delusion, which have ever been offered to the world. It proves, that it could not have been produced by human fancy, or for worldly objects. The mythology of the Egyptians, Phenicians, Greeks, and Romans, is gross and sensual ; and their notions concerning the future destiny of man, vague and ridiculous. Their promises and terrors of a future life are all drawn from *visible objects* ; and carry on the face of them the mark of man's invention. The *Cimmerian Shades* of Homer, and the *Elysian Fields* of Virgil, have nothing that is calculated to purify, to elevate, or to interest the mind. The idea of Tartarus might perhaps excite fear, but the description of the fate of the virtuous will never awaken hope. In the religion of Mahomet, indeed, rewards and punishments are strongly inculcated ; but the Paradise of the Mussulman is a mere copy of an earthly garden of pleasure *, with a boundless indulgence in sensual enjoyment ; the tendency of which has been to debase and enfeeble the human character, and to strengthen and confirm the grossest feelings

* In his History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Mr. GIBBON has given a lively and picturesque description of a Mahometan paradise. " It is natural enough (says this ingenious writer) that an Arabian prophet should dwell with rapture on the groves, the fountains, and the rivers of paradise ; but, instead of inspiring the blessed inhabitants with a liberal taste for harmony and science, conversation and friendship, he idly celebrates the pearls and diamonds, the robes of silk, palaces of marble, dishes of gold, rich wines, artificial

" dainties, numerous attendants, and
" the whole train of sensual and costly
" luxury, which becomes insipid to
" the owner, even in the short period
" of this mortal life. Seventy-two
" *Houris*, or black-eyed girls, of re-
" splendent beauty, blooming youth,
" virgin purity, and exquisite sensibi-
" lity, will be created for the use of
" the meanest believer ; a moment of
" pleasure will be prolonged to a thou-
" sand years, and his faculties will be
" increased an hundred-fold, to render
" him worthy of his felicity." Chap.
50.

and

and most brutal appetites of man. In the CHRISTIAN, DIS-
PENSATION, the pleasures as well as the pains, the rewards as
well as the punishments of a future life, though magnified in the
highest degree, have yet their means and their end concealed
in mystery. They have no visible or material reference; no
relation to, or connexion with, our gross and corporeal state.
They are purely intellectual: and their obvious and necessary
tendency is to restrain the sensual propensities, and to exalt
the spiritual faculties. They are indefinite; and even from
that cause they seem to acquire an increase of interest. Their
etherial and divine nature is too pure and elevated, to be the
object of gross and corporeal senses:—"Eye hath not seen,
"nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,
"the things which God hath prepared for those that love him."
Sublimity is the character of this doctrine; and it is conse-
quently most perfectly adapted to keep awake, and render
vivid, the religious hope and fear of a being, whose capacity
of mental improvement and degradation, of enjoyment and
suffering, is unbounded.

Spiritual na-
ture of Chris-
tianity.

OF miracles and prophecies, it has been observed, that the
first diminish in effect, in proportion as we recede from the
period * when they were performed; and that the latter re-
ceive additional weight, from age to age, by the completion

Authenticity
of miracles.

* THE consequence has been, that
the discussion of the evidence of those
miracles, *which were generally ad-
mitted by the early opponents of
Christianity*, is one of the favou-
rite topics of modern infidelity. It
never occurred to JULIAN, that, be-
cause a miracle is a *variation from*

the general rules of nature, it is there-
fore absolutely incredible. The evi-
dence of miracles was then too recent
and too powerful, to have admitted
such an argument, or to have allowed
of the supposition, that miracles *never
existed*, because we cannot fix the pre-
cise period when they ceased. E.

of

of the events thereby foretold *. On the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, the supernatural powers of the Apostles contributed visibly and evidently to the rapid progress of Christianity. At the first great feast of the Jews that occurred after the resurrection, the miraculous gift of tongues †

* IN the series of prophecies which are to be found in the Old and New Testament, it will be obvious, 1st, That there are many, which must as yet remain unfulfilled; and others, which may have been fulfilled, and the historic evidence of the fact not have reached us. This, however, will not affect the credibility of any other prophecies, of which we have clear and distinct evidence. If, indeed, a particular circumstance were to be foretold, and the event were to be contrary to what has been so predicted, it would follow, that the pretended prophecy is not true. But it is otherwise with prophecies which may not have been fulfilled, or as to which, if the period of fulfilment be passed, the circumstances are unknown to us, or the particulars are obscure and unintelligible. They ought to be put entirely out of the question, and not influence the mind either in favour of or against the truth of the other prophecies. 2d, Until prophecy is completely fulfilled, and the scheme of God's moral government unfolded, the veil which hangs over prophecy cannot be entirely removed. The prophetic writings were not intended to make us prophets,

and to enable us to anticipate future events, but to qualify us to judge of the completion of prophecy by the event, when it happens. 3d, In prophecies, some parts are more distinct and clear; others, from local or chronological circumstances, are, and for the present at least must remain, in some degree, obscure and unintelligible. In appreciating, therefore, the evidence of Christianity, THE WEIGHT OF THE WHOLE should be seriously and attentively considered; and not, as has been done by some writers, the weaker and more obscure parts selected, as the subjects of repeated observation. E.

† IT is hardly possible to conceive any thing more exempt from the possibility of imposition, than this miracle of THE GIFT OF TONGUES. During a great and public feast, when Jerusalem was frequented by persons of various nations and languages, A FEW ILLITERATE AND IGNORANT GALILEANS take upon them to address these different foreigners, each in their own language, and by this unequivocal and uncontrovertible miracle, convert to the Christian faith several thousand persons. E.

to the illiterate disciples, occasioned the conversion of *three thousand* persons,—all of them impartial witnesses of that wonderful event. A few days after, *five thousand* more converts were added to the church by the public miracle which PETER and JOHN performed at the gate of the Temple, at a time when numbers of the Jews were entering, on account of the evening sacrifice.—These and other similar evidences, have not only the concurrent testimony of history, and the confirmation of being referred to in a variety of epistolary correspondence of that and the succeeding age, but they were the *known, acknowledged, and immediate causes* of myriads of individuals embracing, and publickly professing, in the different parts of the Roman empire, a religion, which offered no temporal honour or advantage; but on the contrary subjected its members to ignominy, persecution, torture, and death. In fact, these miracles were not then contested or denied * by the enemies

* JULIAN, who did not controvert the Scripture account of our Saviour's miracles, affects to treat them with contempt, as not being displayed in a grand theatre, in the cure of the great and the opulent, or in a splendid and ostentatious manner. "Jesus (says Julian in his work against the Christians) has now been celebrated about 300 years; having done nothing in his lifetime worthy of remembrance; unless one, thinks it a mighty matter to heal lame and blind people, and exorcise demoniacs in the villages

of Bethsaida and Bethany." We do not find that at that time the performance of OUR SAVIOUR'S miracles was contested by the opponents of Christianity. It was reserved for modern infidelity, after above seventeen centuries, to discover that a miracle cannot be true, because "it is an exception to a general law;"—as if there were not in the constitution and government of the natural world, innumerable things, which are far beyond our finite comprehension. Every part of the economy of the universe is to

*Look at
the
supernatural power* mics of Christianity. That objection has been reserved for the infidels of the present age; for at that period even the *supernatural power* by which these miracles were performed, was conceded and admitted; but then these mighty effects were imputed to MAGIC *, the *nothingness* of which we now know how to appreciate; or to the agency of *evil spirits*, who, by a peculiar absurdity of imagination, were supposed to be thus busily employed, in subverting their own empire, and in promoting the virtue and happiness of man.

Prophecies.

AMONG the prophetic evidences of Christianity are those arising from the former and present state of the Jewish nation. The Pentateuch is universally acknowledged to be the most ancient † history in the world; anterior even to any accredited

us a miracle: and if it be said they are governed by general laws, it will be obvious that the constituting of those laws whereby the natural world is governed, was a more stupendous miracle, than any of those referred to. In the course, however, of the natural world, we see extraordinary phenomena, which do not come within any of the known laws of nature. So may it be with MIRACLES, whenever the moral government of rational and immortal beings may require them: and for any thing we know, natural phenomena and miraculous interpositions may be both subject to general laws. E.

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—When JOHN was in prison, he sent to ask

JESUS, so little did he know him to be Messiah, “Art thou he that should come, or do we expect another?” The answer JESUS made was an appeal to his miracles, which proved him to be a very extraordinary person indeed, but which did not prove him in those days, and *ad homines*, to be the Messiah; FOR A BELIEF OF THE POWERS OF MAGIC WAS NOT AS RIDICULOUS THEN AS IT IS NOW, and the *Pharisees* had prepared the people to believe these very miracles wrought by Beelzebub. *Fourth Essay.*

† The antiquity of sacred history will be most correctly appreciated by a comparison with the most remote traces of profane history, according

accredited tradition of other countries. It contains an account of the Jewish nation being peculiarly selected by the ALMIGHTY, as the depository of prophecy, and as the object of that ceremonial law, which was to keep the Jews *a distinct and separate people*. In that, and in the subsequent parts of the Old Testament, we have the history of GOD's frequent and miraculous interposition in their temporal concerns; of his giving them the promise, and after a period of 400 years, the possession, of a particular territory;—and of his assuring to them the greatest national prosperity as the reward of obedience; and, in the event of disobedience, the greatest possible calamities: so that he “would scatter them among all people, from “one end of the earth even unto the other*,” but that “though he would make a full end of all the nations “whither he had driven them; yet he would not make

The Mosaic dispensation.

to the chronology generally adopted. The siege of TROY was *above three centuries* after the age of Moses, and the Iliad of HOMER was written in the reign of SOLOMON, or of his successor. The FOUNDATION OF ROME was subsequent by seven centuries to the institution of the MOSAIC LAW, and was above four hundred years after the Jewish state had reached its zenith of glory and prosperity, in the time of King Solomon. The prophecies of ISAIAH were delivered more than three centuries prior to the age of SOCRATES, and the Mo-

saic history was written a thousand years before the time of HERODOTUS, who is generally considered as the father of profane history. Allowing for the brevity of the Pentateuch, and its great antiquity, and for the variance of customs and manners in the world during a succession of more than 3000 years, it is surprising that it should be attended with so little obscurity or difficulty, and should be even so obvious as it is to every understanding. E.

* Deut. xxviii. 24.

“a full end of them* ;” for that “the seed of Israel should not cease from being a nation for ever†.”

Promise of
the Messiah.

IN this book it is also foretold, that God would raise up to them the MESSIAH, in whom all his promises should be fulfilled; that he should be rejected by that very people, to whom he had been so long promised, and by whom he was so greatly desired;—and that he should become the Saviour of all nations; so that the Gentiles should come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising.—With this book before us, let us contemplate the present state of religion in the world.—The traces of PAGANISM, then triumphant throughout the Roman empire, are now only to be found in the ruins of temples, in the annals of history, or in the fictions of poetry. In the mean-time CHRISTIANITY has been established throughout all Europe, and its doctrines and influence have been extended over the greater part of the earth; while the dissemination of its moral precepts has had the effect of improving the virtue of mankind, and of raising the standard of morality, even among those who do not recognize its authority.

Dispersion of
the Jews.

LET us at the same time contemplate the Jews, not carried into captivity by the hand of man, as in former ages, but evidently *scattered and dispersed* by the breath of the Divine Power, through all the countries and regions of the earth;—become AN ASTONISHMENT, A PROVERB, AND A BYWORD AMONG ALL NATIONS ‡ —Let us then notice the minute and scrupulous exactness

* Jerem. xlvi. 28.

† Jerem. xxxi. 36.

‡ Deut. xxviii. 27.

with which, after a succession of ABOVE THREE THOUSAND YEARS, the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law (with exception of those from which they are precluded by the want of a temple of worship) are to this hour observed by the Jews, in every nation and in every region of the globe: That it is not merely the consecration of the Sabbath—the memorial of the Passover—the rite of circumcision—the redemption of the first-born—the fasts—the feasts—the new moons—the phylacteries—the tabernacles—and the great day of atonement, that are the objects of their precise and religious observance;—but that every peculiar ceremonial is still minutely and constantly attended to; whether enjoined by the Pentateuch or Mishna *, or recordatory of any of the great events of their miraculous history. Let us also observe, that, while successive nations and empires have existed, and been swept from off the theatre of the world, the Jews are still to be found in considerable numbers † over the face of the

Their observance of the Mosaic law.

Their numbers.

* The MISHNA, or oral law, is held in great respect by the Jews. It is said to have been received by Moses, and delivered by him to Aaron and the 70 elders, and by them in an uninterrupted course of tradition, until it was reduced into writing, not many years before the birth of our SAVIOUR. E.

* To make any calculation of the present number of the Jews would be a work of great difficulty and uncertainty. We find them abound-

ing, not only in the coast of Barbary, in the Levant, in Portugal, Germany, &c. but in every part of the world; and some writers have expressed an opinion, that they are at present as numerous as they were at any period. One may judge of their numbers by two examples: There were thirty-six Jewish synagogues in new Cairo, when it was taken by the Saracens; and at a more recent period, there were forty thousand Jews in Alexandria. E.

whole

whole earth;—and though they have no national establishment, yet their political and religious institutions are still invariably observed by them, in every country “whither “the Lord hath scattered them:”—that they are still looking with anxious desire to the Holy Land, and to the restoration of Jerusalem;—with a desire increased, instead of being diminished, by the lapse of above seventeen centuries:—that they are to this hour offering up prayer* to God, that he would “gather their dispersions from “among the Gentiles, and assemble their scattered from “the extreme parts of the earth †; and conduct them unto “Zion his city with songs, and unto Jerusalem the city “of his sanctuary with everlasting joy.”—Let us weigh all these circumstances, and compare them with the record of the prophecies; and then let us consider whether, instead of ascribing them to the power of blind

* The prayer I allude to (though there are several similar prayers in use among the Jews) is what they use on the great day of atonement. See *Levi's Jewish Ceremonies*, pa. 91. The reader will find a great deal of interesting information in this book; a reference to which is preferred, as being the recent work of a learned and distinguished Jew, who could have no inducement to warp or magnify the evidence which his book supplies in favour of Christianity. E.

† “The dispersion of the Jews (says the Reverend Mr. GILPIN), independent of prophecy, is one of the

“most singular events in the history of mankind: but when we “consider it as the completion “of prophecy—when we consider “this people dispersed and wandering among all the nations upon “earth—without temple—without “laws—without government,—connected with none, but distinct “from all—as if reserved to complete future prophecies—the whole “together, I think, form an argument of sufficient force to weigh “against all the cavils of infidelity.” *Life of Christ.*

chance,

chance, or to the device of weak man, we are not compelled in this wonderful coincidence of events, to acknowledge the special interposition of an all-wise and all-ruling Providence.

AN

HISTORICAL VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY.

CHAP. I.

On the Progress of the Christian Religion.

AND HE said, So is the KINGDOM OF GOD, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the

St. Mark iv.
26.

COMMENTARY.

WHILE the great body of the Roman empire was invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay, a PURE AND HUMBLE RELIGION gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol. Nor was the influence of

Progress of
Christianity.

St. Mark iv.
26.

earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

COMMENTARY.

Christianity confined to the period or to the limits of the Roman empire *. After a revolution of thirteen or fourteen centuries, that religion is still professed by the nations of Europe, the most distinguished portion of human kind, in arts and learning, as well as in arms. By the industry and zeal of the Europeans, it has been widely diffused to the most distant shores of Asia and Africa; and by the means of their colonies has been firmly established from Canada to Chili, in a world unknown to the ancients.

Its rapid progress

THERE is the strongest reason to believe, that before the reigns of Dioclesian and Constantine, the faith of CHRIST had been preached in every province, and in all the great cities of the empire; but the foundation of the several congregations, the numbers of the faithful who composed them, and their propor-

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—Christianity born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated in a little province of the empire, had spread through the whole in the course of three centuries. The progress of it was not so immense, perhaps, as Tertullian represents it in his hyperbolical stile: But it was great; and Christians under one denomination or another, were numerous in every part of the east and west. *Fourth Essay.*

tion

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds which be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge

St. Mark iv.
26.

COMMENTARY.

tion to the unbelieving multitude, are now buried in obscurity, or disguised by fiction and declamation. The rich provinces that extend from the Euphrates to the Ionian sea, were the principal theatre on which the apostle* of the Gentiles displayed his zeal and piety. The seeds of the Gospel, which he had scattered in a fertile soil, were diligently cultivated by his disciples; and it should seem, that, during the two first centuries, the most considerable body of Christians was contained within those limits. Among the societies which were instituted in Syria, none were more ancient or more illus-

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—The doctrines of Christianity, and the facts that proved the divinity of it, were published by discourse, not by writing. CHRIST preached; he was the greatest of preachers, and he sent his disciples out to preach. They pursued their mission through different countries; and as fast as they formed a church in one, they hastened to another. At least this was the practice of St. Paul, who scattered about more spiritual seed than all the rest, and more widely.—PAUL, indeed, was

a great traveller, moving from place to place almost continually, the greatest part of the time that passed between his baptism and his death; that is, according to the calculation of Erasmus, thirty-five years. He went over the countries where PETER taught, more than once.—He had been in Arabia before. He visited Greece, and most of the islands. He penetrated beyond Thracia and Macedonia, into Illyria. He returned into Palestine, and was sent from thence to Rome. *Fourth Essay.*

St. Luke iv.
16.

under the shadow of it.---And HE came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered

COMMENTARY.

trious than those of Damascus, of Berea, or Aleppo, and of Antioch *. The prophetic introduction of the Apocalypse had described and immortalized the seven churches of Asia; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea, and Philadelphia; and their colonies were soon diffused over that populous country. In a very early period, the islands of Cyprus

* ST. PAUL's journey to *Damascus*, immediately before his miraculous conversion, and the authority and force he carried with him, show the early prevalence of Christianity in that place. See Acts ix. 2, and 19—25.—*Antioch* is remarkable for being the place where the disciples first assumed the name of Christians. See Acts xi. 26. The honourable testimony as to the converts of *Berea* is contained in the 17th chapter. "These (it is said) " were more noble than those in " Thessalonica; in that they received the word, with all readiness of " mind, and searched the Scriptures " daily, whether those things were so. " THEREFORE many of them believed; " also of honourable women, which " were Greeks, and of men not a " few." *BEREA* affords a striking in-

stance of the superior advantages of rational conviction, grounded on an earnest and serious inquiry into evidence. THE IMPERIAL SOPHIST, JULIAN, visited the Bereans, with a view of weakening their faith in Christianity; but he had no cause to glory in the effect of his eloquent discourses. In one of his letters to *Libanius*, he says, " I conversed with " the Senate (of *Berea*) on the subject " of religion: but though they all " praised my discourse, yet only a few " were convinced by it; and those " were persons, whom I had reason to " consider as men of sense, before I " began my harangue. The others " behaved with a degree of boldness, " and seemed to have no diffidence " in their manner of addressing " me." E.

and

unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, “ The SPIRIT of the LORD is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal

St. Luke iv.
16.

COMMENTARY.

and Crete, the provinces of Thrace and Macedonia, gave a favourable reception to the new religion; and Christian societies were soon founded in the cities of Corinth, of Sparta, and of Athens. The antiquity of the Greek and Asiatic churches allowed a sufficient space of time for their increase and multiplication; and even the swarms of Gnostics and other heretics serve to display the flourishing condition of the orthodox Church, since the appellation of heretics has always been applied to the less numerous party. To these domestic testimonies, we may add the confession, the complaints, and the apprehensions of the Gentiles themselves. From the writings of Lucian, a philosopher who had studied mankind, and who describes their manners in the most lively colours, we may learn, that, under the reign of Commodus, his native country of Pontus was filled with *Christians*, and those who had quitted the temples of their gods. Within fourscore years after the death of CHRIST, the proconsul Pliny laments the magnitude of that which he vainly attempted to eradicate. In his very curious epistle to the emperor Trajan, he affirms, that the temples were almost deserted, that the sacred victims scarcely found any purchasers, and that this new religion not only prevailed in the cities, but had even spread itself into the villages and the

In Greece,

St. Luke iv.
16.

“ the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the
“ captives, and recovering of sight to the blind ; to
“ set at liberty them that are bruised ; to preach
“ the acceptable year of the Lord.” And he closed
the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and

COMMENTARY.

And in Afri-
ca.

the open country of Pontus and Bithynia *. The African Christians formed, at an early period, one of the principal members of the primitive Church. The practice introduced into that province, of appointing bishops to the most inconsiderable towns, and very frequently to the most obscure villages, contributed to multiply the splendour and importance of their religious societies, which, during the course of the third century, were animated by the zeal of Tertullian, directed by the abilities of Cyprian, and adorned by the eloquence of Lactantius. But if, on the contrary, we turn our eyes towards Gaul, we must content ourselves with discovering, in the time of Marcus Antoninus, the feeble and united congregations of Lyons and Vienna ; and even as late as the reign of Decius, we are assured, that in a few cities only, Arles, Narbonne, Thoulouse, Limoges, Clermont, Tours, and Paris, some scattered churches were

Its progress
in Gaul.

* PLINY's description, in this letter, of the Christians in Bithynia, written within 70 years after the death of Christ, was, that the number was great, not only in the cities, but in smaller towns, and in the open coun-

try.—“ Multi, omnis ætatis, utriusque
“ sexus etiam—neque enim civitates
“ tantum, sed vicos etiam et agros,
“ superstitionis istius contagio perva-
“ gata est.” E.

supported

sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

St. Luke iv.
16.

COMMENTARY.

supported by the devotion of a small number of Christians. The progress of Christianity was not, however, confined to the Roman empire; and according to the primitive fathers, the new religion, within a century after the death of its Divine Author, had already visited every part of the globe. "There exists not," says Justin Martyr, "a people, whether Greek or barbarian, or any other race of men, by whatsoever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell under tents, or wander about in covered waggons, among whom prayers are not offered up in the name of a CRUCIFIED JESUS, to the FATHER and CREATOR of all things."

Beyond the limits of the Roman empire.

SUCH is the constitution of civil society, that whilst a few persons are distinguished by riches, by honours, and by knowledge, the body of the people is condemned to obscurity, ignorance, and poverty. The CHRISTIAN RELIGION, which addressed itself to the whole human race, must consequently collect a far greater number of proselytes from the lower than from the superior ranks of life. As the humble faith of CHRIST diffused itself through the world, it was embraced by several persons who derived some consequence from the advantages of nature or fortune.

Christianity was preached to the poor and ignorant.

Exceptions as to learning.

Acts ii. 22.

YE men of Israel hear these words; JESUS of Nazareth, a man approved of GOD among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him,

COMMENTARY.

fortune. Aristides, who presented an eloquent apology to the emperor Hadrian, was an Athenian philosopher. Justin Martyr had sought divine knowledge in the schools of Zeno, of Aristotle, of Pythagoras, and of Plato, before he fortunately was accosted by the old man, or rather the angel, who turned his attention to the Jewish prophets. Clemens of Alexandria had acquired much various reading in the Greek, and Tertullian in the Latin, language. Julius Africanus and Origen possessed a very considerable share of the learning of their times; and although the style of Cyprian is very different from that of Lactantius, we might almost discover that both these writers had been public teachers of rhetoric. Nor can it be affirmed with truth, that the advantages of birth and fortune were always separated from the profession of Christianity. Several Roman citizens were brought before the tribunals of Pliny, and he soon discovered that a great number of persons of *every order* of men in Bithynia had deserted the religion of their ancestors. It appears, however, that about forty years afterwards, the emperor Valerian was persuaded of the truth of this assertion, since in one of his rescripts he evidently supposes, that senators, Roman knights, and ladies of quality, were engaged

and with regard to rank and fortune.

being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because

Acts ii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

engaged in the Christian sect. And yet these exceptions are either too few in number, or too recent in time, entirely to remove the imputation of ignorance and obscurity, which has been so arrogantly cast on the first proselytes of Christianity.—Our serious thoughts, however, will suggest to us, that the APOSTLES themselves were chosen by Providence among the fishermen of Galilee, and that the lower we depress the temporal condition of the first Christians, the more reason we shall find to admire their merit and success. It is incumbent on us diligently to remember, that the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN was promised to the POOR IN SPIRIT, and that minds afflicted by calamity and the contempt of mankind, cheerfully listen to the Divine promise of FUTURE HAPPINESS*; while, on the contrary, the fortunate

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—In this intermediate state of preparation and probation, all that they, who are appointed ministers of the Gospel, as such, can do, is to advise, exhort, admonish, and to separate themselves, and to persuade the faithful to separate, from the impenitent and refractory.—CHRIST breathed on his apostles, bid them receive the HOLY GHOST, and

we are bound to believe that he inspired the same spirit into them by this act, which descended afterwards more manifestly upon them and the disciples, under the figure of fiery tongues. The gifts of the Spirit were then common, and evidenced themselves by sanctity of life, and by many other unequivocal signs. *Fourth Essay.*

Acts ii. 22.

it was not possible that he should be holden of it.---
Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly,
that God hath made that same JESUS, whom ye have
crucified, both LORD and CHRIST. Now when they

COMMENTARY.

are satisfied with the possession of this world, and the wise
abuse in *doubt* and *dispute* their vain superiority of reason
and knowledge.

Edict of Mi-
lan. A. D.
313.

ABOUT five months after the conquest of Italy, CON-
STANTINE made a solemn and authentic declaration of
his sentiments, by the celebrated edict of Milan, which
restored peace to the Catholic Church; and in the per-
sonal interview of the two western princes, by the ascendant
of genius and power, he obtained the ready concurrence of
his colleague LICINIUS. The union of their names and au-
thority, disarmed the fury of MAXIMIN; and, after the death
of the tyrant of the east, the edict of Milan was received
as a general and fundamental law of the Roman world.
The wisdom of the emperors provided for the restitution of
all the civil and religious rights, of which the CHRISTIANS
had been so unjustly deprived. It was enacted, that the
places of worship, and public lands, which had been con-
fiscated, should be restored to the Church, without dispute,
without delay, and without expense: and this severe injunc-
tion was accompanied with a gracious promise, that if any
of the purchasers had paid a fair and adequate price, they
should be indemnified from the imperial treasury. The salu-
tary regulations which guard the future tranquillity of the
faithful,

heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye

Acts ii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

faithful, are framed upon the principles of enlarged and equal toleration; and such an equality must have been interpreted by a recent sect as an advantageous and honourable distinction. The two emperors proclaim to the world, that they have granted a free and absolute power to the Christians, and to all others, of following the religion which each individual thinks proper to prefer.

WAR and commerce had spread the knowledge of the GOSPEL beyond the confines of the Roman provinces; and the barbarians, who had disdained an humble and proscribed sect, soon learned to esteem a religion which had been so lately embraced by the greatest monarch, and the most civilized nation of the globe. The Goths and Germans, who enlisted under the standard of Rome, revered the cross which glittered at the head of the legions, and their fierce countrymen received at the same time the lessons of FAITH and of HUMANITY. The kings of Iberia and Armenia worshipped the God of their protector; and their subjects, who have invariably preserved the name of Christians, soon formed a sacred and perpetual connection with their Roman brethren. The Christians of Persia were suspected, in time of war, of preferring their religion to

The knowledge of the Gospel extended.
A. D. 338.

Acts ii. 22.

shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward ge-

COMMENTARY.

their country; but as long as peace subsisted between the two empires, the persecuting spirit of the Magi was effectually restrained by the interposition of Constantine. The rays of the Gospel illuminated the coast of India. The colonies of Jews, who had penetrated into Arabia and Ethiopia, opposed the progress of Christianity; but the labours of the missionaries were in some degree facilitated by a previous knowledge of the Mosaic revelation; and Abyssinia still reveres the memory of FRUMENTIUS, who, in the time of Constantine, devoted his life to the conversion of those sequestered regions.

Jovian proclaims universal toleration.

A. D. 363.

UNDER the reign of JOVIAN, Christianity obtained an easy and lasting victory*; and the genius of paganism, which had

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—Christianity was fresh and vigorous. The apparent sanctity of those who professed this religion, the courage of those who died for it, and the zeal of those philosophers and rhetors who were converted to it and writ for it, were more than sufficient to defeat the calumny raised against it. They were more than sufficient, I mean, to defeat it among all such as finding it to be calumny in some instances, looked no farther, but deemed it to be the same in all. Among others, and in general, the very name of Christian continued to be odious long. A spirit of

neration. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about THREE THOUSAND SOULS. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and

Acts ii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

had been fondly raised and cherished by the arts of JULIAN, sunk irrecoverably in the dust. In many cities, the temples were shut or deserted; the philosophers, who had abused their transient favour, thought it prudent to shave their beards, and disguise their profession; and the CHRISTIANS rejoiced, that they were now in a condition to forgive the injuries which they had suffered under the preceding reign. The consternation of the Pagan world was dispelled by a wise and gracious edict of TOLERATION; in which Jovian explicitly declared, that although he should severely punish the sacrilegious rites of magic, his subjects might exercise, with freedom and safety, the ceremonies of the ancient worship.

IN the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries of the Christian æra, the reign of the Gospel and of the Church was ex-

Christianity
of the north.
A. D. 800—
1100.

of enthusiasm prompted many on one side to revile and disturb the rites of an established religion, to provoke the heathen, to rejoice in sufferings, and to court martyrdom. A spirit of party, inflamed by resentment, transported the other side to exercise the greatest cruelties, by sudden popular emotions, as well as by regular authorised perse-

cutions. But as soon as the Christian faith and worship, by being tolerated first, and legally established soon afterwards, became better known, the grossest calumnies that had been propagated against them began to die away even among the vulgar. *Fourth Essay.*

tended

Acts ii. 22.

fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

COMMENTARY.

tended over Bulgaria, Hungary, Bohemia, Saxony, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, and Russia. A laudable ambition excited the monks, both of Germany and Greece, to visit the tents and huts of the barbarians: poverty, hardships, and dangers, were the lot of the first missionaries: their courage was active and patient; their motive pure and meritorious: their present reward consisted in the testimony of their conscience and the respect of a grateful people; but the fruitful harvest of their toils was inherited and enjoyed by the prelates of succeeding times. The first conversions were free and spontaneous: an holy life and an eloquent tongue were the only arms of the missionaries. The leaders of nations, who were saluted with the titles of kings and saints, held it lawful and pious to impose the Catholic faith on their subjects and neighbours: the coast of the Baltic, from Holstein to the gulf of Finland, received the Christian faith; and the reign of idolatry * was

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—Paganism was worn out in one sense, in theory, if not in practice; the impostures of it were detected; the absurd doctrines and rites were exposed to ridicule. The priests could not defend

it, and the philosophers explained it away. It lay exposed like an unfortified country, and, as the empire did soon afterwards, to every incursion. *Fourth Essay.*

And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their

Acts ii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

closed by the conversion of Lithuania in the fourteenth century. Yet truth and candour must ever acknowledge, that the conversion of the north imparted many temporal benefits both to the old and the new Christians*. The rage of war inherent to the human species, could not indeed be entirely healed by the evangelic precepts of CHARITY and PEACE; and the ambition of Catholic princes has renewed in every age the calamities of hostile contention. But the admission of the barbarians into the pale of civil and ecclesiastical society delivered Europe from the depredations, by sea and land, of the Normans, the Hungarians, and the Russians, who learned to spare their brethren, and cultivate their possessions. The establishment of law and order was promoted by the influence of the clergy; and the rudiments of art and science were introduced into the savage countries of the globe. The Slavonian

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—Christianity, as it stands in the Gospel, contains not only a complete, but a very plain system of religion. It is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued, to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same

simplicity with which it was originally taught by CHRIST himself. But this could not have happened, unless it had pleased the Divine Providence to preserve the purity of it by constant interpositions, and by extraordinary means sufficient to alter the ordinary course of things. *Fourth Essay.*

and

Acts ii. 22. meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the LORD added to the Church daily such as should be saved.

COMMENTARY.

and Scandinavian kingdoms, which had been converted by the Latin missionaries, were exposed, it is true, to the spiritual jurisdiction and temporal claims of the Popes; but they were united, in language and religious worship, with each other, and with Rome; they imbibed the free and generous spirit of the European republic, and gradually shared the light of knowledge which arose on the western world.

In the Dark Ages!!

CHAP. II.

Of Polytheism.

YE shall make you no idols, nor graven image, Levit. xxvi.
1.
neither rear you a standing image; neither
shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to

COMMENTARY.

THE thin texture of the Pagan mythology was interwoven with various, but not discordant materials. As soon as it was allowed that sages and heroes, who had lived, or who had died for the benefit of their country, were exalted to a state of power and immortality, it was universally confessed, that they deserved, if not the adoration, at least the reverence of mankind. The deities of a thousand groves*, and a thousand

Principles of
paganism.

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—The poets endeavoured to conceal their *ignorance* under the veil of allegorical physics, and chimerical metaphysics. Thus gods and dæmons, and other hypothetical beings, were multiplied. Festivals and public devotions multiplied with them. Superstition spread, and *external* religion, which was made up of *nothing else*, flourished. But they who instituted religion, for the sake of

government, saw that such religion as this would not be sufficient alone to answer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of public and private morality. It looked no further than the present system of things, and in this they observed no settled distinction made by their gods, between the religious and the irreligious, the best and the worst of them. *Second Essay.*

Levit. xxvi. bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God.
 Deut. vi. 14. ^{1.} ---Ye shall not go after other gods of the gods of
 the people, which are round about you; lest the

COMMENTARY.

streams, possessed, in peace, their local and respective influence; nor could the Roman, who deprecated the wrath of the Tiber; deride the Egyptian, who presented his offering to the beneficent genius of the Nile. The visible powers of nature, the planets, and the elements, were the same throughout the universe. The invisible governors of the moral world were inevitably cast in a similar mould of fiction and allegory. Every virtue, and even vice, acquired its divine representative; every art and profession its patron, whose attributes, in the most distant ages and countries, were uniformly derived from the character of their peculiar votaries. A republic of gods * of such opposite tempers and interests required, in every system, the moderating hand of a supreme magistrate, who, by the progress of knowledge and flattery, was gradually invested with the sublime perfections of an eternal parent, and an omnipotent monarch.

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—If ignorance and fear were the two first sources from which *polytheism and idolatry* arose, flattery was in process of time another. Man grew fonder of polytheism by another custom that prevailed. Every sect framed a new list of gods, or gave new names to

ancient divinities. It would be impossible to enumerate, not only all the ancient gods, but even all those that were worshipped under the same appellation; for Varro, I think, reckons at least THREE HUNDRED JUPITERS.
Second Essay.

anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, Deut. vi. 14.
and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

AND there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent Acts xiv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

THE philosophers of Greece deduced their morals from the nature of *man*, rather than from that of God. They have, however, left us the most sublime proofs of the existence and perfections of the FIRST CAUSE; but as it was impossible for them to conceive the creation of matter, the WORKMAN in the Stoic philosophy* was not sufficiently distinguished from the work; whilst, on the contrary, the spiritual god of PLATO and his disciples, resembled an idea, rather than a substance. The opinions of the Academics and Epicureans were of a less religious cast; but whilst the modest science of the former induced them to doubt, the positive ignorance of the latter urged them to deny, the PROVI-

Opinions of
philosophers,

* VOLTAIRE.—La philosophie de Newton conduit necessairement a la connaissance d'un ETRE SUPREME, qui a tout créé, tout arrangé *librement*. Car si le monde est fini, s'il y a du vuide, la matiere n'existe donc pas necessairement; elle a donc reçu l'existence d'une *cause libre*. Si la matiere gravite, comme cela est démontré, elle ne parait pas graviter de sa nature, ainsi qu'elle est étendue de sa nature: elle a donc reçu de DIEU la gravitation. Si les planetes

tournent en un sens, plutôt qu'en un autre, dans un espace nonrésistant, la main de leur CREATEUR a donc dirigé leur cours en ce sens avec une liberté absolue. Je ne sais s'il y a une preuve métaphysique plus frappante, et qui parle plus fortement a l'homme, que cette ordre admirable qui regne dans le monde, et si jamais il y a eu un plus bel argument que ce verset: CÆLI ENARRANT GLORIAM DEI. *Elements de la Philosophie.*

Acts xiv. 8.

his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked : The same heard Paul speak : who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he

COMMENTARY.

and of their
disciples.

DENCE * of a supreme Ruler. The spirit of inquiry, prompted by emulation, and supported by freedom, had divided the public teachers of philosophy † in a variety of contending sects ; but the ingenuous youth, who from every part resorted to Athens, and the other seats of learning in the Roman empire, were alike instructed in every school to reject and despise the religion of the multitude. How, indeed, was it possible that a philosopher should accept, as *divine truths*, the

* VOLTAIRE.—L'objet intéressant pour l'univers entier, est de savoir s'il ne vaut pas mieux pour le bien de tous les hommes admettre un DIEU *remunérateur et vengeur*, qui récompense les bonnes actions cachées, et qui punit les crimes secrets, que de n'en admettre aucun. *Questions &c. sur l'Atheisme.*

† LORD BOLINGBROKE.—Tully confesses very frankly, that there is nothing so absurd which some philosopher or other has not said ; and his works would furnish sufficient proofs of the assertion, under the Epicurean, the stoical, and the academical characters particularly, if they were wanted. Men who might have been *giants*

in the human sphere, have dwindled into *pigmies*, by going out of it. Had any one of them been wholly founded in real knowledge, and confined to it, as every one of them pretended to be, the certainty and the importance of such a system would have preserved it among the rational part of mankind. Truth, pure and unmixed, would have given it stability. But error has kept them all in a continual flux ; and to the shame of the human head and heart, the most rational, or the most reasoning part, of mankind has maintained this flux, by adopting some errors, by inventing others, and by cultivating both. *Second Essay.*

had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they

Acts xiv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

idle tales of the poets, and the incoherent traditions of antiquity; or, that he should adore as gods, those *imperfect beings* * whom he must have *despised* as men!—Viewing, with a smile of pity and indulgence, the various errors of the vulgar, they diligently practised the ceremonies of their fathers, devoutly frequented the temples of their gods; and sometimes *condescending to act a part* on the theatre of superstition, they concealed the sentiments of an ATHEIST † under the sacerdotal robes. Reasoners of such a temper were scarcely inclined to wrangle about their respective modes of faith, or of worship. It was indifferent to them what shape the *folly*

* THE philosophical apostle of the Gentiles refers, with great force and delicacy, to this defect in the heathen mythology. What I refer to is in the beginning of his address to the people of *Lystra*, who were disposed to pay divine worship to him and his colleague; “We are also men of *like passions as you*, and preach unto “you that ye should turn from these “*vanities* unto the LIVING GOD:” intimating thereby the folly of their religion, which proposed imperfect beings, *governed by human passions*, as objects of divine worship. E.

† VOLTAIRE.—On peut insister, on peut dire, *d’athées*, ils vivent en société, et ils sont sans DIEU; donc on peut vivre en société sans religion. En ce cas, je répondrai que les loups vivent ainsi; et que ce n’est pas une société qu’un assemblage de barbares antropophages, tels que vous les supposez. Et je vous demanderai toujours si, quand vous avez prêté votre argent à quelqu’un de votre société, vous voudriez que ni votre débiteur, ni votre procureur, ni votre notaire, ni votre juge, ne crussent en DIEU. *Questions &c. sur l’Atheisme.*

Acts xiv. 8.

lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The *Gods* are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas *Jupiter*; and Paul,

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of the multitude might choose to assume; and they approached, with the same *inward contempt*, and the same *external reverence*, the altars of the Lybian, the Olympian, or the Capitoline Jupiter*.

Religion of the Germans,

The religious system of the Germans (if the wild opinions of savages can deserve that name) was dictated by their wants, their fears, and their ignorance. They adored the great visible objects and agents of nature, the sun and the moon, the fire and the *earth* †; together with those imaginary deities, who were supposed to preside over the most important occupations of human life. They were persuaded

* BAYLE.—JUPITER, the greatest of the heathen gods, was the son of Saturn and Cybele. There was no crime, but what he was defiled with;—he committed incest with his sisters, daughters, and aunts, and even attempted to ravish his mother. He debauched a great number of maids and wives; and to compass his designs, he borrowed the shapes of all sorts of beasts. He was guilty of unnatural sins. Treacheries and perjuries, and in general all actions that are punishable by the laws, were familiar to him.

Nothing can be MORE MONSTROUS than the religion of the Pagans, who looked upon such a god, as the SUPREME GOVERNOR OF THE WORLD, and suited to that notion the religious worship that was paid him. *Diction. art. Jupiter.*

† TACITUS.—*Angli*, et Varini fluminibus aut silvis muniuntur. Nec quidquam notabile in singulis nisi quod in commune HERTHUM, id est, *Terram matrem* colunt; eamque intervenire rebus hominum, invehì populis arbitrantur. *De Moribus Germanorum.*

that.

Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then Acts xiv. 8.
 the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city,
 brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and

COMMENTARY.

that by some ridiculous arts of divination, they could discover the will of the superior beings, and that human sacrifices were the most precious and acceptable offering to their altars. Some applause has been hastily bestowed on the sublime notion, entertained by that people, of the Deity, whom they neither confined within the walls of a temple, nor represented by any human figure; but when we recollect, that the Germans were unskilled in architecture, and totally unacquainted with the art of sculpture, we shall readily assign the true reason of a scruple, which arose not so much from a superiority of reason, as from a want of ingenuity. The only temples of Germany were dark and ancient groves, consecrated by the reverence of succeeding generations. Their secret gloom, the imagined residence of an invisible power, by presenting no distinct object of fear or worship, impressed the mind with a still deeper sense of religious horror; and the priests, rude and illiterate as they were, had been taught by experience the use of every artifice that could preserve and fortify impressions so well suited to their own interest.

TILL the end of the eleventh century, a celebrated and of the Goths.
 temple subsisted at Upsal, the most considerable town of
 the Swedes and Goths. It was enriched with the gold which
 the Scandinavians had acquired in their piratical adventures,
 and

Acts xiv. 8. would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people,

COMMENTARY.

and sanctified by the uncouth representations of the three principal deities; the God of war, the Goddess of generation, and the God of thunder. In the general festival that was solemnized every ninth year, nine animals of every species (without excepting the human) were sacrificed, and their bleeding bodies suspended in the sacred grove adjacent to the temple. The only traces that now subsist of this barbaric superstition are contained in the EDDA, a system of mythology, compiled in Iceland about the thirteenth century, and studied by the learned of Denmark and Sweden, as the most valuable remains of their ancient traditions.

Abhorrence
of the Chris-
tians for
idolatry.

THE heathen philosopher, who considered the system of *polytheism* as a composition of human fraud and error, could disguise a smile of *contempt* under the mask of devotion, without apprehending that either the mockery, or the compliance, would expose him to the resentment of any invisible, or, as he conceived them, imaginary powers.—But the established religion of Paganism was seen by the PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN in a much more odious and formidable light. The most trifling mark of respect to the national worship, he considered as a direct homage yielded to the dæmon, as *an act of rebellion* against the MAJESTY OF GOD. In consequence of this opinion, it was the first but arduous

crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of *like passions with you*, and preach

Acts xiv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

arduous duty of a Christian, to preserve himself pure, and undefiled by the practice of idolatry. The religion of the nations was not merely a speculative doctrine, professed in the schools or preached in the temples. The innumerable deities and rites of polytheism were closely interwoven with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or of private life; and it seemed impossible to escape the observance of them, without, at the same time, renouncing the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of society. The important transactions of peace and war were prepared and concluded by solemn sacrifices, in which the magistrate, the senator, and the soldier were obliged to preside or to participate. The public spectacles were an essential part of the cheerful devotion of the Pagans, and the gods were supposed to accept, as the most grateful offering, the games that the prince and people celebrated in honour of their peculiar festivals. The Christian, who with pious horror avoided the abomination of the circus or the theatre, found himself encompassed with infernal snares in every convivial entertainment, as often as his friends, invoking the hospitable deities, poured out libations to each others happiness. When the bride, struggling with well-affected reluctance, was forced in hymeneal pomp over the threshold of her new habitation, or when the sad procession of the dead slowly

The difficulties to which they were subjected.

Acts xiv. 8. unto you that ye should turn from these vanities
unto the LIVING GOD, which made heaven, and

COMMENTARY.

moved towards the funeral pile; the Christian, on these interesting occasions, was compelled to desert the persons who were the dearest to him, rather than contract the guilt inherent to those impious ceremonies.

Ignorance of
the philoso-
phers as to
the immorta-
lity of the
soul.

THE writings of CICERO represent in the most lively colours the ignorance, the errors, and the uncertainty of the ancient philosophers with regard to the IMMORTALITY * of the

* UPON the subject of the IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, if I was to attempt to collect from the ancient philosophers and poets, all the melancholy evidence of their dark and dismal uncertainty, I should write, instead of a note, a volume. PLATO's notions differ very little from the dreams of Spinoza; his favourite doctrine being that the DEITY is the SOUL of the universe; and that all spirits emanate from him, and return to him on death;—a doctrine, that is perpetually repeated by Cicero, put by Lucan in the mouth of Cato, and by Virgil in that of Anchises, as the sacred and recondite wisdom of the blessed in Elysium;—a doctrine which destroys every idea of personal identity, and every principle of moral responsibility.—If we turn from this admired

philosopher to his pupil and rival, ARISTOTLE, we shall have a still more melancholy picture to contemplate. "Death (*says he in his Nicomachian Ethics*) is of all things most terrible. "For it is the FINAL PERIOD OF EXISTENCE: and beyond that it appears, there is neither good nor evil, "for the dead man to dread or hope." —If we refer next to CICERO, the devout admirer of Plato, expressing his sentiments in a letter to his friend Toterianus, we find that, under worldly troubles, the melancholy and hopeless prospect of ANNIHILATION was all the comfort that he could point to:—"Cum consilio profici nihil possit, una ratio videtur, quicquid evenerit, ferre moderate; PRESERTIM CUM OMNIUM RERUM MORS SIT EXTREMUM."—But it was not merely in his private

earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their

Acts xiv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

the soul. When they are desirous of arming their disciples against the fear of death, they inculcate, as an obvious, though melancholy position, that the fatal stroke of our dissolution releases us from the calamities of life; and that those can no longer suffer who no longer exist. Yet there were a few sages of Greece and Rome who had

private and confidential communications; but in his public and forensic harangues also, that he renounced the hopes of immortality. Hear him in his oration for Cluentius.—“Nam nunc quidem quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? nisi forte INEPTIIS ac FABULIS ducimur, ut existemus illum apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre? Quæ si falsa sunt, ID QUOD OMNES INTELLIGUNT, quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, præter sensum doloris?”—This doctrine of ANNIHILATION was announced with the same ease and freedom by Cæsar in the senate, and by Pliny, Plutarch, Seneca, Epictetus, and many others, in their philosophical writings.—With examples from these five distinguished characters I shall conclude this long note.—The speech I refer to of CÆSAR was delivered in a full senate, in

the debate respecting the punishment of Catiline and his associates. “In luctu atque miseriis, MORTEM ærumnarum requiem non cruciatum esse: nam CUNCTA MORTALIUM MALA DISSOLVERE; ultro neque curæ, neque gaudio; locum esse.”—The passage from PLINY is in the seventh book (55th chapter) of his Natural History; in which, after observing on the uncertainty of philosophers as to the future state of the soul, he tells us that they all agreed, that whatever was its condition before birth, the same would it be after death. He then goes on to descant on the vanity of looking forward to the hopes of a future existence, as if there was any thing in the breath of man, to distinguish him from “the beasts that perish.” He asks how the soul can exist without a material body, and where will be its future residence;

Acts xiv. 9. own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from

COMMENTARY.

had conceived a more exalted, and, in some respects, a juster idea of human nature; though it must be confessed, that in the sublime inquiry, their reason had been often guided by their imagination, and that their imagination had been prompted by their vanity. When they viewed with complacency the extent of their own mental powers,

and observes *very justly* that, in many cases, the PAIN OF DYING must be greatly enhanced by the anxiety of WHAT MAY HAPPEN AFTER DEATH. I had made a translation of this passage, but I prefer giving it in the author's own words.—“Post sepulturam
“*aliæ atque aliæ manium ambages.*
“Omnibus a suprema die eadem quæ
“ante primum: nec magis a mortē
“sensus ullus aut corpori aut animæ,
“quam ante natalem. Eadem enim *vanitas*
“in futuram etiam se propagat, et
“in mortis quoque tempora, ipsa sibi vi-
“tam mentitur: alias IMMORTALITA-
“TEM ANIMÆ, alias transfigurationem,
“alias *sensum inferis dando*, et manes
“colendo, deumque faciendo, qui jam
“etiam homo esse desierat: Ceu vero
“ullo modo *spirandi* ratio homini a
“cæteris animalibus distet, aut non
“diuturniora in vita multa reperiantur,

“quibus nemo similem divinat immortalitatem. Quod autem corpus animæ persequitur materiam? ubi cogitatio illi? quomodo visus, auditus, aut quid agit, qui usus ejus, aut quod sine his bonum? Quæ deinde sedes, quantave multitudo tot seculis animarum velut umbrarum? Puerilium ista deliramentorum, *avidæque nunquam desinere mortalitatis* commenta sunt.—Quæ (malum) ista dementia est, *iterari vitam morte?* quæve genitis *quies* unquam, si in sublimi sensus animæ manet, inter inferos umbræ? Perdit profecto ista dulcedo credulitasque præcipuum naturæ bonum mortem, ac *duplicat obitus*, si dolere etiam post FUTURI ESTIMATIONE evenit.” PLUTARCH tells us (*in his tract on Superstition*), DEATH IS THE FINAL PERIOD OF OUR BEING. But Superstition says NO. She stretches

heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our heart with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce Acts xiv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

powers, when they exercised the various faculties of memory, of fancy, and of judgment, in the most profound speculations; or the most important labours, and when they reflected on the desire of fame, which transported them into future ages, far beyond the bounds of death and of the grave; they were unwilling to confound themselves with the beasts of the field, or to suppose, that a Being for whose dignity they entertained the most sincere admiration, could be

“stretches out life beyond life itself. Her fears extend further than our existence. She joins to the idea of death, the inconsistent idea of *eternal life*.” In his consolatory letter to Marcia (Daughter of Cremutius Cordus), SENECA observes, “*Cogita, nullis defunctum malis affici: illa quæ nobis inferos faciunt terribiles, FABULAM esse: nullas imminere mortuis tenebras, nec carcerem, nec flumina flagrantia igne, nec oblivionis amnem. MORS OMNIUM DOLORUM ET SOLUTIO EST, ET FINIS.*” And to conclude, the stoic EPICTETUS, on the subject of death and annihilation, thus expresses himself: “But whither do you go? no where to your hurt. You return from whence you came: to a *friendly consociation* with your kindred elements. What there was of the nature of fire in your composition, returns to the element of fire; what there was of earth, to earth; what of air, to air; what of water, to water. THERE IS NO HELL, NOR ACHERON, COCYTUS, NOR PYRIPHLEGETHON.”—Such are the reveries of the heathen philosophers and statesmen, on the future state of the soul: Men, who, to repeat Lord Bolingbroke’s expression, were GIANTS in human knowledge, but PIGMIES when they attempted to rise beyond it.—How different is this dark and miserable uncertainty from that DIVINE WISDOM WHICH “HATH BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.” E.

Acts xiv. 8.
xvii. 22.

restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.---Then Paul stood in the midst

COMMENTARY.

limited to a spot of earth, and to a few years of duration. With this favourable prepossession they summoned to their aid the science, or rather the language of metaphysics. They soon discovered, that as none of the properties of matter will apply to the operations of the mind, the human soul must consequently be a substance distinct from the body, pure, simple, and spiritual, incapable of dissolution *, and susceptible of a much higher degree of virtue and happiness after the release from its corporeal prison. From these specious and noble principles, the philosophers who trod in the footsteps of Plato, deduced a very unjustifiable opinion, since they asserted, not only the future

* WE may wonder that philosophers made no practical use of this argument. We find the human frame composed of materials which are perpetually changing, dissolving, and separating; and we thence infer its entire dissolution: But the soul is not composed of such materials, being endued with primitive and individual identity; and therefore, as far as the analogy can apply, not liable to be involved in the dissolution of the body which it animates. We may likewise observe, that the senses and limbs are only the *instruments* by which the soul perceives and acts;

and not essential to her existence; as appears in many instances, when limbs and organs of sense have been lost, without affecting the vitality of the soul, and in some instances, where the loss of one of the senses has been attended even with an improvement of the intellectual and reflective faculties. Such was the case of MILTON; whose reflective powers, during blindness, were so augmented, as to have placed the visible objects of creation before his mind, more luminously and distinctly, than they are displayed to the keenest eye, endowed with perfect organs of vision. E. immortality,

of Mars Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I

Acts xvii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

immortality, but the past eternity of the human soul, which they were too apt to consider as a portion of the infinite and self-existent spirit*, which pervades and sustains the universe.

A DOCTRINE thus removed beyond the senses and the experience of mankind, might serve to amuse the leisure of a philosophic mind; or, in the silence of solitude, it might sometimes impart a ray of comfort to desponding virtue; but the faint impression which had been received in the schools, was soon obliterated by the commerce and business of active life. We are sufficiently acquainted with the

Inefficacy of their doctrine.

* WARBURTON.—As to the celebrated argument of Plato for the immortality of the soul, explained and enforced by Cicero, it is so big with *impiety* and *nonsense*, that one would wonder how any Christian divine could have the indiscretion to recommend it, as doing credit to ancient philosophy; or to extol the inventors or espousers of it, as having delivered and entertained very just, rational, and proper notions concerning the immortality of the human soul. If we examine this philosophy, as it is delivered by Plato in his *Phædrus*, or it is translated by Cicero in his first *Tusculan*,

we shall find that it gives the human soul the attributes of the Divine Being, and supposes it to have been from eternity, uncreated and self-existent. Speaking of the principle of *motion*, or the *soul*, it says (1 *Tusc. cap. 2, 3.*), "Principii autem nulla est origo: nam "a principio oriuntur omnia. Ipsum "autem nulla ex re nasci potest: nec "enim esset id principium, quod gigneretur aliunde.—Id autem nec nasci "potest nec mori. Hæc est propria "natura animi atque vis; quæ si est "una ex omnibus, quæ se ipsa semper "moveat, neque nata certe est, et eterna est." *Divine Legation.*

Inconsistent in footnote gallery

eminent

Acts xvii. 22.

passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

COMMENTARY.

eminent persons who flourished in the age of Cicero, and of the first Cæsars, and their actions, their characters, and their motives, to be assured that their conduct in this life was *never regulated by any serious conviction of the rewards and punishments of a future state* *. At the bar and in the senate of Rome the ablest orators were not apprehensive of giving offence to their hearers, by exposing that doctrine † as an idle and extravagant opinion, which was rejected with contempt by every man of a liberal education and understanding.—Since, therefore, the most sublime efforts of philosophy can extend no farther than feebly to point out the desire, the hope, or, at most, the probability, of a future state, there is nothing except

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—What effects the motive of *rewards and punishments* had in remote antiquity, we cannot say; but it had lost its force long before the institution of CHRISTIANITY. The fear of hell particularly was ridiculed by some of the greatest moralists; and to shew how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may observe that TULLY treated it in some of his public pleadings as he would have avoided scrupulously to do, whatever he thought of it himself, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar. *Fourth Essay,*

† VOLTAIRE.—Le plus grand bienfait dont nous soyons redevables au Nouveau Testament, c'est de nous avoir révélé L'IMMORTALITE DE L'AME.—Il faut d'autant plus benir la revelation de l'immortalité de l'ame, et des peines et des récompenses apres la mort, que la vaine philosophie des hommes en a toujours douté.—Les hommes les plus vertueux même, et les plus persuadés de l'existence d'un DIEU, n'espéraient alors aucune récompense, et ne craignaient aucune peine. *Questions &c. sur l'Ame.*

Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God, that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Acts xvii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

A DIVINE REVELATION that can ascertain the existence, and describe the condition, of the invisible country which is destined to receive the souls of men after their separation from the body. We may perceive several defects inherent to the popular religions of Greece and Rome, which rendered them very unequal to so arduous a task. 1. The general system of their mythology was unsupported by any solid proofs; and the wisest among the Pagans had already disclaimed its usurped authority. 2. The description of the infernal regions had been abandoned to the fancy of painters and of poets, who peopled them with so many phantoms and monsters*, who dispersed their rewards and punishments with so little equity, that a solemn truth, the most congenial to the human heart, was oppressed and disgraced by the absurd mixture of the

* HUME.—It is observable, that HERODOTUS in particular scruples not, in many passages, to ascribe *envy* to the gods; a sentiment, of all others, the most suitable to a *mean and devilish* nature. The pagan hymns, however, sung in public worship, contained nothing but epithets of praise; *even while the actions ascribed to the gods were the* most barbarous and detestable. When Timotheus, the poet, recited a hymn to DIANA, in which he enumerated, with the greatest eulogies, all the actions and attributes of that cruel, capricious goddess: "May your daughter," said one present, "become such as the deity whom you celebrate." *Natural History of Religion.*

Acts xvii. 22.

neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the

COMMENTARY.

wildest fictions *. 3. The doctrine of a future state was scarcely considered among the devout polytheists of Greece and Rome as a fundamental article of faith. The providence of the gods, as it related to public communities rather than to private individuals, was principally displayed on the visible theatre of the present world. The petitions which were offered on the altars of Jupiter or Apollo expressed the anxiety of their worshippers for temporal happiness,

* It is not very easy to ascertain what was the *happy immortality* of PLATO. He says in the *Gorgias*, that the dead retain not only the *passions and infirmities*, but also the *defects and injuries* of the body. *Virgil*, his disciple, has exemplified his doctrine, by describing the mangled phantom of Deiphobus in strict conformity to the principles of his master's school.

— Priamiden laniatum corpore toto
Deiphobum vidit, lacerum crudeliter ora ;
Ora, manusque ambas, populataque tempora raptis
Auribus, et truncas inhonesto vulnere nares.
Vix adeo ignovit pavitantem, et dira tegentem
Supplicia ; —

At the same time *Virgil* tells us that

all the petty propensities of this life attend our course in a future state :

— quæ cura nitentes

Pascere equos, eadem sequitur Tellure repostos.

If this son of King Priamus, like other princes, had been fond of racing and riding, it is not easy to see how his mangled and miserable trunk, “ trembling and endeavouring to escape observation,” could have enjoyed his fashionable amusements, deprived of both arms, of ears and nose, and cruelly lacerated in every part of his body. Elysium could offer little entertainment to him, however green her fields might be, or however brilliant the atmosphere. E.

and

earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Acts xvii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

and their ignorance or indifference concerning a future life.

THE ministers of polytheism, both in Rome and in the provinces, were, for the most part, men of a noble birth, and of an affluent fortune, who received, as an honourable distinction, the care of a celebrated temple, or of a public sacrifice, exhibited, very frequently at their own expense, the sacred games, and with cold indifference performed the ancient rites, according to the laws and fashion of their country. As they were engaged in the ordinary occupations of life, their zeal and devotion were seldom animated by a sense of interest, or by the habits of an ecclesiastical character. Confined to their respective temples and cities, they remained without any connection of discipline or government; and whilst they acknowledged the supreme jurisdiction of the senate, of the college of pontiffs, and of the emperor, those civil magistrates contented themselves with the easy task of maintaining, in peace and dignity, the general worship of mankind. We have already seen how various, how loose, and how uncertain, were the religious sentiments of polytheists. They were abandoned, almost without controul, to the natural workings of a superstitious fancy. The accidental circumstances of their life and situation determined the object as well as the degree of their devotion; and as

Weakness of
polytheism.

Acts xvii. 22.

him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us : For in him we live, and move, and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have

COMMENTARY.

long as their adoration was successively prostituted to a thousand deities, it was scarcely possible that their hearts could be susceptible of a very sincere or lively passion for any of them *.

Scepticism of
the heathen
world.

WHEN CHRISTIANITY appeared in the world, even these faint and imperfect impressions had lost much of their original power. Human reason, which by its unassisted

* PAGANISM possessed no religious sanctions competent to give weight to *evidence upon oath* : and consequently recourse was had in every ordinary case, to *torture and scourging*, as the means of *verifying facts*. I avoid stating the variety of *cruel* examples which Tacitus has supplied. I shall only remind the reader of two facts—1st, That when LYSIAS, the chief captain, wished to examine St. Paul, “that he might know wherefore the Jews cried so much against him,” he ordered, as a matter of course, that “*St. Paul should be examined by scourging*,” as the usual means (we may infer) of obtaining proper evidence.—2d, That when the *humane* PLINY received an information against

the Christians, the first and obvious method that occurred to him, was to examine the attendants, *by putting them to the rack*. Nor was this inhuman method of extracting truth, drop by drop, through the *alembick of torture*, peculiar to the Romans : the same barbarous custom prevailed among the Greeks. Among other examples, we may refer to the well-known circumstance, alluded to by Demosthenes in his *first Olynthiac* ;—of public slaves being ordered to attend the Athenian generals in the field ; so that, as the annotator observes, “if there was occasion for evidence on any public inquiry into their conduct of the war, these attendants might be *put to the torture*.” E.

strength

said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then Acts xvii. 22.
as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to
think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver,

COMMENTARY.

strength * is incapable of perceiving the mysteries of FAITH, we
had already obtained an easy triumph over the *folly* of
paganism; and when Tertullian or Lactantius employ their
labours in exposing its falsehood and extravagance, they
are obliged to transcribe the eloquence of Cicero or the
wit of Lucian. The contagion of these sceptical writings
had been diffused far beyond the number of their readers.
The fashion of incredulity was communicated from the philo-
sopher to the man of pleasure or business, from the noble to
the plebeian, and from the master to the menial slave
who waited at his table, and who eagerly listened to the
freedom of his conversation. On public occasions the phi-
losophic part of mankind affected to treat with respect and
decency the religious institutions of their country: but their
secret contempt penetrated through the thin and awkward dis-
guise; and even the people, when they discovered that their

* VOLTAIRE.—Deja convaincu que
ne connaissant pas ce que je suis, je
ne peux connaître ce qu'est mon AU-
TEUR. Mon ignorance m'accable a
chaque instant, et je me console en
reflechissant sans cesse qu'il n'importe
pas que je sache si mon Maître, LA
PUISSANCE UNIQUE, ETERNELLE, est

ou non dans l'étendue, pourvu que je
ne fasse rien contre la conscience
qu'il m'a donnée. De tous les sys-
temes que les hommes ont inventés
sur la Divinité, quel sera donc celui
que j'embrasserai? CELUI DE L'ADO-
RER. *Le Philosophe Ignorant.*

deities

Acts xvii. 22. or stone, graven by art and man's device. And [the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent : Because

COMMENTARY.

deities were rejected and derided by those whose rank or understanding they were accustomed to reverence, were filled with doubts and apprehensions concerning the truth of those doctrines, to which they had yielded the most implicit belief. The decline of ancient prejudice exposed a very numerous portion of human kind to the danger of a painful and comfortless situation. The introduction of some other mode of superstition might soon have occupied the deserted temples of Jupiter and Apollo, if the wisdom of Providence had not interposed a **GENUINE REVELATION** *; fitted to inspire the most rational esteem and conviction, whilst, at

* **ROUSSEAU.**—La majesté des ecritures m'étonne, la sainteté de l'évangile parle à mon cœur. Voyez les livres des philosophes avec toute leur pompe; qu'ils sont petits près de celui-là! Se peut-il qu'un livre, à la fois si sublime et si simple, soit l'ouvrage des hommes? Se peut-il que celui, dont il fait l'histoire, ne soit qu'un homme lui-même? Est-ce-là le ton d'un enthousiaste ou d'un ambitieux sectaire? Quelle douceur, quelle pureté dans ses mœurs! quelle grace touchante dans ses instructions! quelle élévation dans

ses maximes! quelle profonde sagesse dans ses discours! quelle présence d'esprit, quelle finesse et quelle justesse dans ses réponses! quel empire sur ses passions! Où est l'homme, où est le sage qui sait agir, souffrir, et mourir sans faiblesse et sans ostentation? Quand Platon peint son juste imaginaire convert de tort, d'opprobre, du crime, et digne de tous les prix de la vertu, il peint trait pour trait **JESUS CHRIST**: la ressemblance est si frappante, que tous les peres l'ont senti, et qu'il n'est pas possible de s'y tromper. *Emile.*

the

he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. Acts xvii. 22.

COMMENTARY.

the same time, it was adorned with all that could attract the curiosity, the wonder, and the veneration of the people.

CHRISTIANITY was supported by the number of its converts, by the chain of prophecy, the splendour of miracles, and the weight of evidence. The elaborate work which Julian writes against Christianity. A. D. 362.

JULIAN * composed amidst the preparations of the Persian war, contained the substance of those arguments, which he had long revolved in his mind. The insidious design of undermining the foundation of Christianity † was insepa-

* NO PERSONS have done more real injury to the cause of Christianity, than those who have endeavoured to add to its evidence by *fraud or fiction*. On the contrary, its most virulent enemies have done it very essential service. If I was to select the person who, after ST. PAUL, had by *his writings* most contributed to establish and confirm the evidence of the Christian religion, I should without hesitation name the emperor JULIAN. There are very few difficulties about the authenticity of the Scripture and the Gospel history, but may be solved by reference to his hostile invectives. Dr. Lardner, in his 46th chapter of Heathen Testimonies, with his usual industry and accuracy, has selected these evidences from the works of Julian; and he has so arranged them, as to make the selection one of the most curious and interesting parts of that valuable work. E.

† JULIAN's attempt to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem was made with the *avowed object* of weakening the evidence of revelation. The detail of this unsuccessful attempt will make part of the fifth chapter of this work. E.

Rom. i. 21.

THE GENTILES, when they knew God, glorified him not as God, neither were thankful ; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was dark-

COMMENTARY.

His superstition.

rably connected with the zeal which Julian professed, to restore the ancient religion of the empire. Instead of maintaining the lofty state of a monarch, distinguished by the splendour of his purple, and encompassed by the golden shields of his guards, JULIAN solicited, with respectful eagerness, the meanest offices which contributed to the worship of the gods. Amidst the sacred but *licentious* crowd of priests, of inferior ministers, and of female dancers, who were dedicated to the service of the temple, it was the business of the EMPEROR to bring the wood, to blow the fire, to handle the knife, to slaughter the victim, and thrusting his bloody hands into the bowels of the expiring animal, to draw forth the heart or liver, and to read, with the consummate skill of an *haruspex*, the imaginary signs of future events.

His attempt to reform and restore the pagan religion.

BUT the genius and power of JULIAN were unequal to the enterprise of restoring a religion, which was destitute of theological principles, of moral precepts, and of ecclesiastical discipline ; which rapidly hastened to decay and dissolution, and was not susceptible of any solid or consistent reformation. The jurisdiction of the supreme pontiff, more especially after that office had been united with the imperial dignity, comprehended the whole extent of the Roman empire. Julian named for his vicars, in the several provinces, the priests and philosophers, whom he esteemed the best qualified

ened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible

Rom. i. 21.

COMMENTARY.

qualified to co-operate in the execution of his great design; and his *pastoral letters*, if we may use that name, still represent a very curious sketch of his wishes and intentions.—The imperial pontiff inculcates, in the most persuasive language, the duties of benevolence and hospitality; exhorts his inferior clergy to recommend the universal practice of those virtues; promises to assist their indigence from the public treasury; and declares his resolution of establishing hospitals * in every city, where the poor should be received without any invidious distinction of country or of religion. Julian beheld with envy the wise and humane regulations of the Church; and he very frankly confesses his intention to deprive the CHRISTIANS of the applause, as well as advan-

* JULIAN.—Have no communication even with the servants, children, or wives, of the GALILEANS.—Admonish your priests not to frequent the theatre, nor to drink in taverns. Erect hospitals in each of your cities, so that strangers may partake of our benevolence; and not only those of our religion, but, if they are indigent, others also. How these expences are to be defrayed, must now be considered. I have ordered Galatia to supply you with 30,000 bushels of wheat annually; one fifth of which is to be given to the poor who attend on your priests, and the rest among the strangers and our own beggars. When none of the Jews are obliged to beg, and the GALILEANS RELIEVE BOTH THEIR OWN POOR AND OURS, it is shameful that our poor should receive no assistance from us. To Arsacius, high priest of Galatia.

Rom. i. 21.

God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to un-

COMMENTARY.

tage, which they had acquired by the *exclusive practice of charity and beneficence*. The same spirit of imitation might dispose the emperor to adopt several ecclesiastical institutions, the use and importance of which were approved by the success of his enemies. But if these imaginary plans of reformation had been realized, the forced and imperfect copy would have been less beneficial to paganism, than honourable to Christianity. The Gentiles, who peaceably followed the customs of their ancestors, were rather surprised than pleased with the introduction of foreign manners; and, in the short period of his reign, Julian had frequent occasions to complain of the want of fervour of his own party.

Final extinction of Paganism. A.D. 390—420.

THE experience of ages had betrayed the weakness, as well as folly, of paganism*; the light of reason and of faith had

* HUME.—The stories of the gods were numberless; and though every one, almost, believed a part of these stories, yet no one could believe or know the whole: While, at the same time, all must have acknowledged, that no one part stood on a better foundation than the rest. The traditions of different cities and nations were also,

on many occasions, directly opposite; and no reason could be assigned for preferring one to the other. And as there was an infinite number of stories, with regard to which tradition was nowise positive; the gradation was insensible, from the most fundamental articles of faith, to those loose and precarious fictions. The pagan religion, therefore,

cleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and

Rom. i. 21.

COMMENTARY.

had already exposed, to the greatest part of mankind, the *vanity of idols*; and the declining sect, which still adhered to their worship, was permitted to enjoy, in peace and obscurity, the religious customs of their ancestors.—The eloquent Libanius has praised the moderation of THEODOSIUS, who never enacted, by any positive law, that all his subjects should immediately embrace and practise the religion of their sovereign. The profession of CHRISTIANITY was not made an essential qualification for the enjoyment of the civil rights of society, nor were any peculiar hardships imposed on the sectaries, who credulously received the fables of Ovid, and obstinately rejected the miracles of the Gospel. The palace, the schools, the army, and the senate, were filled with declared and devout Pagans; they obtained, without distinction, the civil and military honours of the empire. Theodosius distinguished his liberal regard for virtue and genius, by the

therefore, seemed to vanish like a cloud, whenever one approached to it, and examined it piecemeal. It could never be ascertained by any fixed dogmas and principles. And though this did not convert the generality of mankind from so absurd a faith; for when will the people be reasonable?

yet it made them falter and hesitate more in maintaining their principles, and was even apt to produce, in certain dispositions of mind, some practices and opinions, which had the appearance of determined infidelity. *Natural History of Religion.*

consular

Rom. i. 21.

worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

COMMENTARY.

consular dignity, which he bestowed on Symmachus; and by the personal friendship which he expressed to Libanius: and the two eloquent apologists of paganism were never required either to change, or to dissemble, their religious opinions. The Pagans were indulged in the most licentious freedom of speech and writing. The generation, however, that arose in the world after the promulgation of the imperial laws, was attracted within the pale of the Catholic Church: and so rapid, yet so gentle, was the fall of PAGANISM, that only twenty-eight years after the death of Theodosius, the faint and minute vestiges were no longer visible to the eye of the legislator.

CHAP. III.

Of the Spirit of Christianity.

LOVE your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the

Luke vi. 27.

COMMENTARY.

CHRISTIANITY offered itself to the world, armed with the strength of the Mosaic law, and delivered from the weight of its fetters. An exclusive zeal for the truth of religion and the unity of GOD, was as carefully inculcated in the new as in the ancient system: and whatever was now revealed to mankind concerning the nature and designs of the Supreme Being, was fitted to increase their reverence for that mysterious doctrine *. The divine authority of Moses and the prophets

Liberal zeal
of Christia-
nity.

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—The system of religion, which CHRIST published, and his evangelists recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of TRUE RELIGION, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them by asserting the divine mission of the publisher,

who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles; and it enforces the whole law of faith, by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world.
Fourth Essay.

was

Luke vi. 27. other; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again. *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.* For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for

COMMENTARY.

was admitted, and even established, as the firmest basis of Christianity. From the beginning of the world, an uninterrupted series of predictions had announced and prepared the long expected coming of the MESSIAH, who, in compliance with the gross apprehensions of the Jews, had been more frequently represented under the character of a king, and conqueror*, than under that of a prophet, a martyr, and the Son of God. By his expiatory sacrifice, the imperfect sacrifices of the temple were at once consummated and abolished. The ceremonial law, which consisted only of types and figures, was succeeded by a pure and spiritual worship, equally adapted to all climates, as well as to every condition of mankind; and to the initiation of blood, was substituted a more harmless initiation of water. The promise of Divine favour, instead of being partially confined to the posterity of Abraham, was universally proposed to the freeman and the

* VOLTAIRE.—Les Juifs ont toujours attendu un libérateur; mais leur libérateur est pour eux, et non pour nous; ils attendent un Messie, qui rendra les Juifs maîtres des Chrétiens. Et nous espérons, que le Messie réunira un jour les Juifs aux Chrétiens. *Remarques sur Pascal.*

slave,

sinner's also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies,

Luke vi. 27.

COMMENTARY.

slave, to the Greek and to the barbarian, to the Jew and to the Gentile *. Every privilege that could raise the proselyte from earth to heaven, that could exalt his devotion, secure his happiness, or even gratify that secret pride, which, under the semblance of devotion, insinuates itself into the human heart, was still reserved for the members of the Christian Church; but at the same time all mankind was permitted, and even solicited, to accept the glorious distinction, which

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—Whilst the Christians were confounded with the Jews, or passed for a sect of that religion, they shared the hatred and contempt which that nation had contracted. But they distinguished themselves soon, in a manner that took off all prejudice of this kind from them, and showed the wisdom and policy of St. Paul's conduct in declaring himself the apostle of the Gentiles, to whom the kingdom of CHRIST was opened, and who were heirs of the promises as well as the Jews. On this popular

principle CHRISTIANITY was propagated: and one of the first edicts, that Constantine published in favour of CHRISTIANITY, was a very severe one against the Jews, who should insult Christians, and Christians who should turn to Judaism. The Jews were no longer a chosen people: their nation was rejected; AND ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WERE INVITED TO PARTAKE OF THE SAME PRIVILEGES, THE SAME GRACES, AND THE SAME SALVATION. *Fourth Essay.*

Luke vi. 27. and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not

COMMENTARY.

was not only proffered as a favour, but imposed as an obligation. It became the most sacred duty of a new convert, to diffuse among his friends and relations the inestimable blessing which he had received, and to warn them against a refusal that would be severely punished as a criminal disobedience to the will of a benevolent but all-powerful Deity.

Origin of
sects.

It has been remarked, with more ingenuity than truth, that the virgin purity of the Church was never violated by *schism* or *heresy* before the reign of Trajan or Hadrian, about one hundred years after the death of Christ. We may observe with much more propriety, that, during that period, the disciples of the MESSIAH were indulged in a freer latitude both of faith and practice, than has ever been allowed in succeeding ages. As the terms of communion were insensibly narrowed, and the spiritual authority of the prevailing party * was exercised with increasing severity, many of its most respectable adherents, who were called upon to renounce, were

* VOLTAIRE.—S'il n'y avait en Angleterre qu'une religion, le despotisme serait à craindre. S'il n'y en avait que

deux, elles se couperaient la gorge; mais il y en a trente, elles vivent en paix et heureuses. *Des Presbyteriens.*

provoked

be condemned: forgive and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto ye; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to

Luke vi. 27.

COMMENTARY.

provoked to assert their private opinions, to pursue the consequences of their mistaken principles, and openly to erect the standard of rebellion against the unity of the church.— But whatever difference of opinion might subsist *, all were animated by the same exclusive zeal, and by the same abhorrence for idolatry, which had distinguished the Jews from the

* THE DIFFERENCE that has existed in the religious opinions and modes of worship of CHRISTIANS, constituted one of the earliest objections to the Gospel: and it has had considerable weight with many, who have not considered whether the points upon which they differ, are of importance, or not; and whether the difference between the several denominations of CHRISTIANS (or of *Protestants* at least) does not apply to subjects, upon which God has not thought fit to make an express revelation; and which may, therefore, be presumed not to be essential.—All Christians believe in the perfection and moral government of God;—in the degradation of human nature by transgression;—in the life, death, and sufferings of JESUS CHRIST;—in the assurance of Divine aid;—in the necessity of repentance and a good life;—in a resurrection from the dead, and in a state of rewards and punishments. If, therefore, we would but consider, how well we agree in fundamentals, we should cherish a more friendly intercourse between *all sects*; and instead of devoting our time to controversial tracts, and the *tactics of the church militant*, we should unite in promoting, both at home and abroad, the cause of true religion. We should then find that a variety of sects, like a variety of

L

men,

John xv. 12.

you again.---This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants;

COMMENTARY.

the other nations of the ancient world. The most anxious diligence indeed was required, to guard the chastity of the Gospel from the infectious breath of idolatry. The superstitious observances of public or private rites were carelessly practised, from education and habit, by the followers of the established religion. But as often as they occurred, they afforded the Christians an opportunity of declaring and confirming

men, may dwell together in harmony and brotherly love; and that, while Christian zeal and Christian charity are promoted, the collision of opinion may tend to produce a more perfect understanding of the spirit and doctrines of revealed religion.—“The modesty of Christians (says ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON) “is contented in divine mysteries to know what God has thought fit to reveal concerning them; and hath no curiosity to be wise above that which is written. It is enough to believe what God says concerning these matters: and if any man will venture to say more, every other man

“surely is at liberty to believe as he sees reason.”—“And” (he adds in another place) “some are so concerned about *speculative opinions* in religion, which they call *fundamental articles of faith*, that the practice of religion is almost neglected by them. THE GREATEST HERESY IN THE WORLD IS A WICKED LIFE. God will sooner forgive a man a hundred defects of his understanding, than one fault of his will.”—“Enough (to cite the words of BISHOP HORNE) “has been given to the arts of controversy: Let something be given to the studies of PIETY and an HOLY LIFE. If we
“can

for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit,

John xv. 12.

COMMENTARY.

firming their zealous opposition. By these frequent protestations their attachment to the faith was continually fortified, and, in proportion to the increase of zeal, they combated with the more ardour and success in the holy war, which they had undertaken against the empire of idolatry.

BUT the primitive Christian demonstrated his *faith* by his *VIRTUES*; and it was very justly supposed that the divine persuasion, Virtues of the Christians.

“ can once unite in these, our tempers may be better disposed to unite in doctrine.”—With these sentiments, let us not forget that the principles on which *Dissenters* secede from our church, are the same as those on which we have separated from the church of Rome:—“ the right of private judgment and of liberty of conscience, and a reference to scripture as the only rule of Christian faith and practice.” In the recognition of this right it would be well, if we would turn our attention to the many essential things in which we agree, and fairly appreciate estimable qualities, instead of dwelling on petty peculiarities. Who can withhold respect from those who separated from the established church in a corrupt age, and sacrificed all their domestic comforts and temporal advantages to conscientious motives? Yet these were the *Puritans* and *Nonconformists*.—Who will say that the peculiar rite of the *Anabaptists*, and the religious ceremonies of the *Moravians*, are not conformable to the practice of the primitive Christians? Who can be blind to the active and indefatigable zeal of the *Methodists*, or can contemplate the industry, domestic prudence, and peaceful demeanour of the *Friends*

John xv. 12.

and that your fruit should remain : that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.

COMMENTARY.

persuasion, which enlightened or subdued the understanding, must, at the same time, purify the heart and direct the actions of the believer. The first apologists of CHRISTIANITY, who justify the innocence of their brethren, and the writers of a later period, who celebrate the sanctity of their ancestors, display, in the most lively colours, the reformation of manners which was introduced into the world by the preaching of the

(whom we call *Quakers*), and their wise and successful attention to education, and not wish that their virtues were possessed by all mankind? In our observation of natural objects, we find that VARIETY marks all the works of GOD, and is to be traced through every part of the animate and inanimate, the corporeal and intellectual world. On the slightest examination, we shall discover that the mind of each individual is stamped with an *original peculiarity*. Our capacities, habits, and views differ; and diversity of opinion is the inevitable consequence of that difference. The SUPREME BEING might, undoubtedly, have so diffused

the light of revelation, as that all should have had but one mind. But he has thought fit to ordain it otherwise; and it appears to have been his intention that conscientious Christians, searching earnestly the same scriptures, should nevertheless think differently on certain immaterial points of faith and practice. Let us, therefore, increase in kindness and charity, and the distinction of sects will soon be forgot. "There may" (says Dr. Witherspoon) "be smaller differences, which keep "Christians asunder *on earth*, while "in FAITH and in LOVE to an UN- "SEEN SAVIOUR they are perfectly "united. We are told that GOD shall "gather

AND the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul : neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own ; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness, of the resurrection of the LORD JESUS : and great grace was upon

Acts iv. 32.

COMMENTARY.

the Gospel. When the Christians of Bithynia were brought before the tribunal of the younger Pliny, they *assured* * the Proconsul, that, far from being engaged in any unlawful conspiracy, they were bound by a solemn obligation to abstain from the commission of those crimes, which disturb the private or public peace of society,—from theft, robbery, adul-

“ gather his elect from the four winds,
 “ and that many shall come from the
 “ east and west, and shall sit down
 “ with Abraham, and Isaac, and Ja-
 “ cob, in the kingdom of heaven. I
 “ always think with much pleasure on
 “ the perfect union of the great and
 “ general assembly of the first-born.
 “ Then all other distinctions, all other
 “ designations, shall be abolished, and
 “ those shall make one pure and un-
 “ mixed society,—WHOSE NAMES ARE
 “ WRITTEN IN THE LAMB’S BOOK OF
 “ LIFE.” E.

* MR. GIBBON’S candour has made him appear to undervalue the weight of this *evidence*. It was extracted

by *torture* from the attendants, and confirmed by the *confession* of those, who, under the terror of persecution, had renounced Christianity. Pliny informs Trajan that he thought proper, *quid esset veri et per tormenta querere*, and that the *evidence* he obtained was, “ quod essent soliti stato die ante lu-
 “ cem convenire, carmenque CHRISTO,
 “ quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem ;
 “ seque sacramento, non in scelus
 “ aliquod, obstringere,—SED NE FUR-
 “ TA, NE LATROCINIA, NE ADULTE-
 “ RIA COMMITTERENT, NE FIDEM
 “ FALLERENT, NE DEPOSITUM AP-
 “ PELLATI ABNEGARENT.” *Lib. x.*
Epist. 97.

tery,

Acts. iv. 32.

them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, and of

COMMENTARY.

tory, perjury, and fraud. Near a century afterwards, TERTULLIAN *, with an honest pride, could boast, that very few Christians had suffered by the hand of the executioner, except on account of their religion. Their serious and sequestered life, averse to the gay luxury of the age, inured them to chastity, temperance, economy, and all the sober and domestic virtues. As the greater number were of some trade or profession, it was incumbent on them, by the strictest integrity and the fairest dealing, to remove the suspicions which the profane are too apt to conceive against the appearances of sanctity. The contempt of the world exercised them in the habits of humility, meekness, and patience. The more they were persecuted, the more closely they adhered to each other. Their mutual charity and unsuspecting con-

* TERTULLIAN.—Pro tanta innocentia, pro tanta probitate, pro justitia, pro fide, pro veritate, pro Deo vivo,

crematur; quod nec sacrilegi, nec hostes publici, verum nec tot majestatis rei, pati solent. *Ad Scapulum*, cap. iv.

the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Acts iv. 32.

CHILDREN, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admo- Ephes. vi. 1.

COMMENTARY.

fidence have been remarked by infidels *, and were too often abused by perfidious friends.

THE community of goods, which had so agreeably amused the imagination of Plato, and which subsisted in some degree among the austere sect of the Essenians, was adopted for a short time in the primitive church. The fervour of the first proselytes prompted them to sell those worldly possessions, which they despised, to lay the price of them at the feet of the apostles; and to content themselves Alms and oblations of the church.

* LUCIAN.—It is wonderful what alacrity the *Christians* shew, when any of their friends are in trouble. They spare nothing on such an occasion;—FOR THESE POOR MEN ARE PERSUADED THAT THEY ARE IMMORTAL, AND SHALL LIVE FOR EVER. They therefore despise death, and offer up their lives a voluntary sacrifice; being taught that THEY ARE ALL BRETHREN; and that, quitting our Grecian gods, they must worship their Teacher who was crucified, and live in obedience to his laws. They despise all worldly treasures, and hold them to be for the common benefit of all. *Death of Peregrinus.*

with

Ephes. vi. 1.

*deduction to
control prob-
lem*

nition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good

COMMENTARY.

with receiving an equal share out of the general distribution. The progress of the Christian religion relaxed, and gradually abolished this generous institution, which, in hands less pure than those of the apostles, would too soon have been corrupted and abused by the returning selfishness of human nature; and the converts who embraced the new religion were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony, to receive legacies and inheritances, and to increase their separate property by all the lawful means of trade and industry. Instead of an absolute sacrifice, a moderate proportion was accepted by the ministers of the Gospel; and in their weekly or monthly assemblies, every believer, according to the exigency of the occasion, and the measure of his wealth and piety, presented his voluntary offering for the use of the common fund.—The Bishop was the natural steward of the church; the public stock was entrusted to his care without account or controul; the presbyters were confined to their spiritual functions, and the more dependent order of deacons was solely employed in the management and

Distribution
of them.

thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; Ephes. vi. 1.

COMMENTARY.

and distribution of the ecclesiastical revenue. By some of these unfaithful stewards the riches of the Church were lavished in sensual pleasures, by others they were perverted to the purposes of private gain, of fraudulent purchases, and of rapacious usury. But as long as the contributions of the Christian people were free and unconstrained, the abuse of their confidence could not be very frequent, and the general uses to which their liberality was applied, reflected honour on the religious society. A decent portion was reserved for the maintenance of the Bishop and his clergy; a sufficient sum was allotted for the expences of the public worship, of which the feasts of love, the *agapæ*, as they were called, constituted a very pleasing part. The whole remainder was *the sacred patrimony of the poor*. According to the discretion of the Bishop, it was distributed to support widows and orphans, the lame, the sick * and the aged of the community; to comfort stran-

* VOLTAIRE.—Cicero parle en plusieurs endroits de la *charité universelle*; mais on ne voit point que la police et la bienfaisance des Romains ayent établi de ces maisons de charité, ou les pauvres et les malades fussent soulagés aux dépens du public.—Les *hopitaux* pour les pauvres semblent avoir été inconnus dans l'ancienne Rome.—LES HOPITAUX, sont des monumens de bienfaisance.—Il n'est guère aujourd'hui de ville en Europe sans hopitaux. Questions, &c. sur Charité.

1 Peter ii. 13.

neither is there respect of persons with him.---Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king, as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him

COMMENTARY.

Their active
charity.

gers and pilgrims, and to alleviate the misfortunes of prisoners and captives, more especially when their sufferings had been occasioned by their firm attachment to the cause of religion. A generous intercourse of charity united the most distant provinces, and the smaller congregations were cheerfully assisted by the alms of their more opulent brethren. Such an institution, which paid less regard to the merit than to the distress of the object, very materially conduced to the progress of Christianity. The Pagans, who were actuated by a sense of humanity, while they derided the doctrines, acknowledged the benevolence, of the new sect. The prospect of immediate relief and of future protection allured into its hospitable bosom many of those unhappy persons, whom the neglect of the world would have abandoned to the miseries of want, of sickness, and of old age. There is some reason, likewise, to believe, that great numbers of infants*, who, according

* VOLTAIRE.—On exhortait les Chrétiens riches à adopter les enfans des pauvres. On faisait des collectes pour les veuves et les orphelins ; mais on ne recevait point l'argent des pecheurs. Vous ne pourrez etre surpris

que d'une seule chose, c'est que cette RELIGION si vraie ne se soit pas etendue tout-d'un-coup dans les deux hemispheres, sans en excepter l'isle la plus sauvage. *Questions &c. sur Christianisme.*

for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of

1 Peter ii. 18.

COMMENTARY.

to the inhuman practice of the times, had been exposed by their parents, were frequently rescued from death, baptized, educated, and maintained by the piety of the Christians, and at the expense of the public treasure.

MADIXI - THE
WAY OF THE
FUTURE!

THE counsels of princes are more frequently influenced by views of temporal advantage, than by considerations of abstract and speculative truth. The partial and increasing favour of CONSTANTINE might naturally be referred to the esteem which he entertained for the moral character of the CHRISTIANS; and to a persuasion, that the propagation of the Gospel would inculcate the practice of private and public virtue *. Whatever latitude an absolute monarch may assume in

Use and
beauty of
Christianity.

* LORD BOLINGBROKE.—We cannot doubt, that the political views of CONSTANTINE, in the establishment of Christianity, were to attach the subjects of the empire more firmly to himself and his successors, and the several nations that composed it, to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to soften the

ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiousness of the provinces, and by infusing a spirit of moderation and submission to government, to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire was so often and so fatally broken. Now no religion

1 Peter ii. 18.

God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

1 John iv. 7.

BELOVED, let us love one another; for love is of

COMMENTARY.

in his own conduct, whatever indulgence he may claim for his own passions, it is undoubtedly his interest that all his subjects should respect the natural and civil obligations of society. But the operation of the wisest laws is imperfect and precarious. They seldom inspire virtue, they cannot always restrain vice. Their power is insufficient to prohibit all that they condemn, nor can they always punish the actions which they prohibit. The legislators of antiquity had summoned to their aid the powers of education and of opi-

religion was ever so well proportioned, nor so well directed, as that of CHRISTIANITY seemed to be to all these purposes. It had, indeed, no tendency to inspire that love of the country, nor that zeal for the *glory and grandeur* of it, which glowed in the breast of every Roman citizen almost, whilst the commonwealth was in splendour. But it recommended, what CONSTANTINE liked better, BENEVOLENCE, PATIENCE, HUMILITY, and all the softer virtues; subjection to the civil powers

as to the ordinances of God, and passive obedience and non-resistance. These it recommended; and these it is said the CHRISTIANS had practised, not only whilst they lay under the ordinary hardships imposed upon them, but under the extraordinary severity of *ten persecutions*, wherein ecclesiastical writers boast, how truly may be doubted, that thirty bishops of the Church of Rome alone were martyrised. *Fourth Essay.*

nion.

God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God,

1 John iv. 7.

COMMENTARY.

nion. But every principle which had once maintained the vigour and purity of Rome and Sparta, was long since extinguished in a declining and despotic empire. Philosophy still exercised her temperate sway over the human mind, but the cause of virtue derived very feeble support from the influence of the Pagan superstition. Under these discouraging circumstances, a prudent magistrate might observe with pleasure the progress of a religion, which diffused among the people a PURE, BENEVOLENT, AND UNIVERSAL SYSTEM OF ETHICS *, adapted to every duty and every condition of life; recommended as the will and reason of the Supreme Deity, and enforced by the sanction of eternal rewards or punishments.

THE primitive Christians derived the institution of civil

Obedience to civil government.

* VOLTAIRE.—Quoi donc, LES VRAIS CHRETIENS auraient tant de vertu?

Ah! la loi qui l'oblige a cet effort sublime,

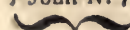
Je commence a la croire, est la loi d'un Dieu même.

J'ai connu l'amitié, la constance, la foi;

Mais tant de grandeur d'ame est au-dessus de moi;

Tant de vertu m'accable, et son charme m'attire.—*Alzire.*

government,

 John iv. 7. but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, be-

COMMENTARY.

government, not from the consent of the people, but from the decrees of heaven. The reigning emperor, though he had usurped the sceptre by treason and murder, immediately assumed the sacred character of vicegerent of the Deity.—The humble Christians were sent into the world as sheep among wolves; and since they were not permitted to employ force, even in the defence of their religion, they should be still more criminal if they were tempted to shed the blood of their fellow creatures, in disputing the vain privileges, or the sordid possessions, of this transitory life. Faithful to the doctrine of the apostle, who in the reign of Nero had preached the duty of unconditional submission, the Christians of the three first centuries preserved their conscience pure and innocent of the guilt of secret conspiracy, or open rebellion. While they experienced the rigour of persecution, they were never provoked either to meet their tyrants in the field, or indignantly to withdraw themselves into some remote and sequestered corner of the globe.

The shows of
gladiators
abolished,
A. D. 404.

IN the games of HONORIUS, upon the triumph which followed the defeat of Alaric, the inhuman combats of *gladiators* polluted

cause he hath given us of his spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in

1 John iv. 7.

COMMENTARY.

polluted, for the last time, the amphitheatre of Rome. The first Christian emperor, CONSTANTINE, may claim the honour of the first edict, which condemned the art and amusement of shedding human blood; but his benevolent law expressed the wishes of the prince, without reforming an inveterate abuse, which degraded a civilized nation below the condition of savage cannibals. Several hundred, perhaps *several thousand victims* were annually slaughtered in the great cities of the empire; and the month of December, more peculiarly devoted to the combats of gladiators, still exhibited, to the eyes of the Roman people, a spectacle of blood and cruelty. Amidst the general joy of the victory of *Pollentius*, a Christian poet exhorted the emperor to extirpate, by his authority, the horrid custom which had so long resisted the voice of humanity and religion. The pathetic representations of PRUDENTIUS were less effectual than the generous boldness of TELEMACHUS, an Asiatic monk, whose death was more useful to mankind than his life. The Romans were provoked by the interruption of their pleasures; and the rash monk, who had descended into the arena to separate the gladiators, was overwhelmed under a shower of stones. But the madness of the people soon subsided; they respected

1 John iv. 7. him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

COMMENTARY.

spected the memory of Telemachus, who had deserved the honours of martyrdom; and they submitted, without a murmur, to the laws of Honorius, which abolished for ever the *human sacrifices* of the amphitheatre. The citizens, who adhered to the manners of their ancestors, might perhaps insinuate, that the last remains of a martial spirit were preserved in this school of fortitude, which accustomed the Romans to the sight of blood, and to the contempt of death: a vain and cruel prejudice, so nobly confuted by the valour of ancient Greece, and of modern Europe!

CHAP. IV.

Of the Persecution of the Christians.

BEHOLD, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves : Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men : for they will

Matt. x. 16.

COMMENTARY.

IF we seriously consider the purity of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION, the sanctity of its moral precepts, and the innocent as well as austere lives of the greater number of those, who during the first ages embraced the faith of the Gospel, we should naturally suppose, that so benevolent a doctrine * would

Christianity persecuted by the Roman emperors.

* ROUSSEAU.—Nos gouvernemens modernes doivent incontestablement au CHRISTIANISME leur plus solide autorité, leurs revolutions moins fréquentes ; il les a rendus eux-mêmes moins sanguinaires ; cela se prouve par le fait, en les comparant aux gouvernemens anciens. La religion mieux connue, écartant le fanatisme, a donné plus de douceur aux mœurs Chrétiennes. Le changement n'est point

l'ouvrage des lettrés ; car partout où elles ont brillé, L'HUMANITE N'EN A ÉTÉ PAS PLUS RESPECTÉE ; les cruautés des Athéniens, des Egyptiens, des empereurs de Rome, des Chinois, en font foi. Que d'œuvres de miséricorde sont l'ouvrage de L'ÉVANGILE !—Combien les approches des temps de communion n'opèrent-elles point de reconciliations et d'aumônes ! Emile.

Matt. x. 16.

deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testi-

COMMENTARY.

have been received with due reverence, even by the unbelieving world; that the learned and the polite, however they might deride the miracles, would have esteemed the virtues, of the new sect; and that the magistrates, instead of persecuting, would have protected an order of men who yielded the most passive obedience to the laws, though they declined the active cares of war and government. If, on the other hand, we recollect the universal toleration of polytheism, as it was invariably maintained by the faith of the people, the incredulity of philosophers, and the policy of the Roman senate and emperors, we are at a loss to discover what *new offence* the CHRISTIANS had committed, what new provocation could exasperate the *mild indifference* of antiquity, and what new motives could urge the Roman princes, who beheld without concern a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway, to inflict a severe punishment on any part of their subjects, who had chosen for themselves a peculiar but an inoffensive mode of faith and worship.

Inquiry into
their motives.

THE religious policy of the ancient world seems to have assumed a more stern and intolerant character, to oppose the progress of Christianity. About fourscore years after the death of CHRIST, his innocent disciples were punished with death

mony against them and the Gentiles. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. And fear not

Matt. x. 16.

COMMENTARY.

death by the sentence of a proconsul of the most amiable and philosophic character, and according to the laws of an emperor, distinguished by the wisdom and justice of his general administration. The apologies which were repeatedly addressed to the successors of Trajan, are filled with the most pathetic complaints, that the *Christians* who obeyed the dictates, and solicited the liberty, of conscience, were alone, among all the subjects of the Roman empire, excluded from the common benefits of their auspicious government. A reason has been assigned for the conduct of the emperors towards the primitive Christians, which may appear the more specious and probable, as it is drawn from the acknowledged genius of polytheism. It has already been observed, that the religious concord of the world was principally supported by the implicit assent and reverence which the nations of antiquity expressed for their respective traditions and ceremonies. It might therefore be expected, that they would unite with indignation * against any sect or people which should separate itself from the communion of mankind; and,

* VOLTAIRE.—Les Chrétiens étaient haïs des Payens, parce qu'ils tendaient à abattre la religion de l'empire, dont ils vinrent enfin à bout; comme les Protestants se sont rendus les maîtres dans les mêmes pays où ils furent longtemps haïs, persécutés, et massacrés. *Remarques sur Pascal.*

Matt. x. 16. them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear HIM which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Whosoever therefore

COMMENTARY.

claiming the exclusive possession of divine knowledge, should disdain every form of worship except its own, as impious and idolatrous.

Character of
the Chris-
tians aspers-
ed.

MALICE and prejudice had concurred in representing the Christians as a society of *atheists*, who, by the most daring attack on the religious constitution of the empire, had merited the severest animadversion of the civil magistrate. They had separated themselves (they gloried in the confession) from every mode of *superstition*, which was received in any part of the globe, by the various temper of *polytheism* : but it was not altogether so evident what deity, or what form of worship, they had substituted to the gods and temples of antiquity. The pure and sublime idea, which they entertained of the Supreme Being, escaped the gross conception of the Pagan multitude ; who were at a loss to discover a SPIRITUAL GOD, that was neither represented under any corporeal figure or visible symbol, nor was adored with the accustomed pomp of libations and festivals, of altars and sacrifices. The sages of Greece and Rome, who had elevated their minds to the contemplation of the existence and attributes of the First Cause, were induced by reason or by vanity, to reserve for themselves and their chosen disciples the privilege of this philosophical devotion. They were far from admitting the prejudices of mankind as the standard of truth, but

Imperfect
notions of
the Hea-
thens.

shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my FATHER which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my FATHER which is in heaven. Matt. x. 16.

COMMENTARY.

but they considered them as flowing from the original disposition of human nature ; and they supposed that any popular mode of faith and worship, which presumed to disclaim the assistance of the senses, would, in proportion as it receded from superstition, find itself incapable of restraining the wanderings of the fancy and the visions of fanaticism. The Pagan multitude, reserving their gratitude for temporal benefits alone, rejected the inestimable present of LIFE AND IMMORTALITY, which was offered to mankind by JESUS OF NAZARÉTH. His mild constancy in the midst of cruel and voluntary sufferings, his universal benevolence *, and the sublime

* VOLTAIRE.—Il n'y a que peu de passages dans *les Evangiles*, dont l'esprit persécuteur ait pu inferer que l'intolérance, la contrainte, sont legitimes ;—et ces exemples n'ont pas le moindre rapport aux persecutions sur le dogme. Presque tout le reste des paroles et des actions de JESUS CHRIST preche la douceur, la patience, l'indulgence. C'est le pere de famille qui reçoit l'enfant prodigue ; c'est l'ouvrier qui vient à la dernière heure, et qui est payé comme les autres ; c'est le Samaritain charitable ; lui-même justifie ses disciples de ne pas jeuner ; il pardonne à la pecheresse ; il se contente de recommander la fidélité à la femme adultère : il daigne même condescendre à l'innocente joie des convives de Cana ; il veut bien faire un miracle en leur faveur, il change pour eux l'eau en vin. Il n'éclate pas même contre Judas, qui doit le trahir ; il ordonne à PIERRE de ne se jamais servir de l'épée ; il reprend les enfans de Zébedée, qui, à l'exemple d'Elie, voulurent faire des-

scendre

Rom. viii. 35.

Who shall separate us from the love of CHRIST? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is writ-

COMMENTARY.

sublime simplicity of his actions and character, were insufficient, in the opinion of those carnal men, to compensate for the want of fame, of empire, and of success; and whilst they refused to acknowledge his stupendous triumph over the power of darkness and of the grave, they misrepresented, or they insulted, the humble birth, wandering life, and ignominious death, of the Divine Author of Christianity.

The fire at Rome under the reign of Nero.

IN the tenth year of the reign of NERO, the capital of the empire was afflicted by a fire, which raged beyond the memory or example of former ages. The monuments of Grecian art and of Roman virtue, the trophies of the Punic and Gallic wars, the most holy temples, and the most splendid palaces, were involved in one common destruction. The voice of rumour accused the emperor as the incendiary * of his own capital; and as the most incredible stories are the best adapted to the genius of an enraged people, it was gravely reported, and firmly believed, that Nero, enjoying the calamity which he had occasioned, amused himself with singing to his lyre the destruction of ancient Troy. To divert a suspicion which the power of despotism was unable to sup-

scendre le feu du ciel sur une ville qui n'avait pas voulu le loger. Enfin, il meurt victime de l'envie,—et s'offrit volontairement. *Sur l'Intolérance.*

* THIS is mentioned only as a *rumour* by Tacitus, but it is stated as an *historical fact* by Suetonius, and confirmed by the authority of Dion. E.

ten, For thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through

Rom. viii. 35.

COMMENTARY.

press, the EMPEROR resolved to substitute in his own place, some *fictitious criminals*. “ With this view (continues Tacitus *) “ he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men, “ who, under the vulgar appellation of *Christians*, were already “ branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name “ and origin from CHRIST, who in the reign of Tiberius had “ suffered death, by the sentence of the procurator *Pontius Pilate*. For a while this dire superstition was checked ; but “ it again burst forth, and not only spread itself over Judea, “ the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and “ protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The “ confessions of those who were seized, discovered a great “ multitude of their accomplices, and they were all convicted, “ not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as for “ their hatred of human kind. They died in torments, and “ their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some “ were nailed on crosses ; others sewn up in the skins of wild “ beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs : others again, “ smeared over with combustible materials, were used as “ torches † to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens

* Tacit. Annal. lib. xv.

which Nero committed on the innocent and unoffending Christians, in the attempt to divert the public attention from his own guilt :

† JUVENAL has alluded (Sat. 1. v. 155.) to this dreadful act of cruelty,

“ Pone

Rom. viii. 35. him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

COMMENTARY.

“gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse race, and honoured with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt * of the Christians deserved indeed the most exemplary punishment; but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration, from the opinion that those unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare, as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant.”

Popular clamours
against the
Christians.

ON the stated returns of the public games and festivals, the inhabitants of the great cities of the empire were collected in the circus of the theatre; where every circumstance of the place, as well as of the ceremony, contributed to kindle their devotion, and to extinguish their humanity. Whilst the numerous spectators, crowned with garlands, perfumed with incense, purified with the blood of victims, and surrounded

“Pone Tigellinum,—teda lucebis in illa,

“Qua stantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant,

“Et latum media sulcum deducit arena.”

I cannot help adding the scholiast's elucidation,—“Id est, *teda et lino circumdatus et incensus, lucebis et cre-*
“*maberis: quo Christiani stantes et*
“*alligati ardebant, cum fixa illis essent*

“*guttura, ne se curvarent.*” What would CHRISTIAN EUROPE say to such savage barbarity? E.

*TACITUS speaks here of their guilt, in having deserted the idols of their countrymen, and devoted themselves to the worship of the ONE TRUE God. E.

with

height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.---We are troubled on every Rom. viii. 35. 2 Cor. iv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

with the altars and statues of their tutelar deities, resigned themselves to the enjoyment of pleasures, which they considered as an essential part of their religious worship; they recollected, that the Christians alone abhorred the gods of mankind, and by their absence and melancholy on these solemn festivals, seemed to insult or to lament the public felicity. If the empire had been afflicted by any recent calamity, by a plague, a famine, or an unsuccessful war; if the Tiber had, or if the Nile had not, risen beyond its banks; if the earth had shaken, or if the temperate order of the seasons had been interrupted, the superstitious Pagans were convinced, that the crimes and the impiety of the Christians, who were spared by the excessive lenity of the government, had at length provoked the Divine justice. It was not among a licentious and exasperated populace, that the forms of legal proceedings could be observed; it was not in an amphitheatre, stained with the blood of wild beasts and gladiators, that the voice of compassion could be heard. The impatient clamours of the multitude denounced the Christians as the enemies of gods and men, doomed them to the severest tortures, and venturing to accuse by name some of the most distinguished of the new sectaries, required with irresistible vehemence that they should be instantly apprehended, and cast to the lions. The provincial governors and magistrates

2 Cor. iv. 8.

side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body

COMMENTARY.

who presided in the public spectacles, were usually inclined to gratify the inclinations, and to appease the rage, of the people, by the sacrifice of a few obnoxious victims.

Trials of the
the Chris-
tians.

It was said, however, that punishment was not the *inevitable* consequence of conviction; and that the Christians, whose guilt was most clearly proved by the testimony of witnesses, or even by their voluntary confession, still retained in their own power the alternative of life or death:—that it was not so much the past offence, as the actual resistance, which excited the indignation of the magistrate. He was persuaded that he offered them an *easy pardon*, since, if they consented to cast a few grains of *incense upon the altar* *, they were dismissed from the tribunal in safety and with applause. It was esteemed

* THE TERMS of this *easy pardon* (as it is called) were the worshipping and burning incense to the *heathen idols*, and to the Roman emperor; and renouncing for ever, and reviling the name of, CHRIST. Pliny's letter to Trajan mentions that, *by this clemency*, he succeeded in making several *apostates*; “qui negarunt se esse Christianos, aut fuisse; quum, præeunte me, deos appellarunt, et imagini tuæ, quam propter hoc jusseram cum si-

mulacris numinum afferri, vino ac thure sacrificarent,—præterea MALEDICERENT CHRISTO; ergo dimit-tendos putavi:—*Omnes et imaginem tuam, deorumque simulacra venerati sunt, et CHRISTO MALEDIXERUNT.*” Pardon was offered to these *innocent* and *conscientious* men, on condition of their worshipping a Roman emperor and Pagan deities, and renouncing for ever, and blaspheming, their SAVIOUR AND REDEEMER. E.


the dying of the LORD JESUS, that the life also of ^{2 Cor. iv. 8.} Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus'

COMMENTARY.

the duty of a humane judge to endeavour to reclaim, rather than to punish, those *deluded enthusiasts*. Varying his tone according to the age, the sex, or the situation of the prisoners, he frequently *condescended* to set before their eyes every circumstance which could render life more pleasing, or death more terrible; and to solicit, nay to intreat them, that they would shew some compassion to themselves, to their families, and to their friends. If threats and persuasions proved ineffectual, he had often recourse to *violence*; the SCOURGE and the RACK were called in to supply the deficiency of argument; and every art of cruelty was employed to subdue such inflexible, and, as it appeared to the Pagans, such criminal obstinacy.

THEY were far, however, from condemning all the Christians who were accused before their tribunal, and very far from punishing with death *all* those who were convicted of adherence to the new superstition. Contenting themselves, for the most part, with the *milder* chastisements of IMPRISONMENTS, EXILE, OR SLAVERY IN THE MINES, they left the *unhappy victims* of their justice some reason to hope, that a prosperous event, the accession, the marriage, or the triumph of an emperor, might speedily restore them, by a general pardon, to their former state. The martyrs, devoted to immediate execution by the Roman magistrates, appear to have

Examples of
their *milder*
punishments.

2 Cor. iv. 8.  sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. For our light affliction, which is but for

COMMENTARY.

been selected from the most opposite extremes. They were either bishops and presbyters, the persons the most distinguished among the Christians by their rank and influence, and whose example might strike terror into the whole sect; or else they were the meanest and most abject among them, particularly those of the servile condition, *whose lives were esteemed of little value*, and whose sufferings were viewed by the *ancients* with too careless an indifference.

Ardour of
the first
Christians.

THE epistles which IGNATIUS composed as he was carried in chains through the cities of Asia, express his resolution to provoke and irritate the wild beasts which might be employed as the instruments of his death. Some stories are related of the courage of martyrs, who actually performed what Ignatius had intended; who exasperated the fury of the lions, pressed the executioner to hasten his office, cheerfully leaped into the fires which were kindled to consume them, and discovered a sensation of joy and pleasure in the midst of the most exquisite tortures *. Several examples have been preserved of a zeal

* ADDISON.—A standing miracle of the three first centuries, was the amazing and supernatural courage or patience which was shewn by innumerable multitudes of martyrs, in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the *burning iron chair* at Lyons, amidst the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still

a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: 2 Cor. iv. 8.

COMMENTARY.

zeal impatient of those restraints which the emperors had provided for the security of the church. The Christians sometimes supplied by their voluntary declaration the want of an accuser, disturbed the public service of Paganism, and rushing in crowds round the tribunal of the magistrates; called upon them to pronounce and to inflict the sentence of the law *. The behaviour of the Christians was too remarkable to

still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a grate of iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his SAVIOUR. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unassisted in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered itself out of such a dreadful distress, by any means that could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine that many persons, in so good a cause, might have laid down their lives at the gibbet,

the stake, or the block; but *to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures*, when they might come out of them, even by a mental reservation, or an hypocrisy, which is not without the possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think that there was some MIRACULOUS POWER to support the sufferer. *Evidences, sect. 7.*

* THE EXAMPLES of the Christian martyrs will shew how incompatible a *present and clear view of the happiness of a future state* would be with the functions and duties of the present life. If pious Christians had the same distinct vision of the FELICITY that awaits

2 Cor. iv. 8. for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye

COMMENTARY.

to escape the notice of the ancient philosophers; but they seem to have considered it with much less admiration than astonishment. Incapable of conceiving the motives which sometimes transported the fortitude of believers beyond the bounds of prudence or reason, they treated such an eagerness to die as the strange result of obstinate despair, of stupid insensibility, or of superstitious frenzy. Notwithstanding this real or affected disdain, the intrepid constancy of the faithful was productive of more salutary effects on those minds which nature, or grace, had disposed for the reception of religious truth. On these melancholy occasions, there were many among the Gentiles who pitied, who admired, and who were converted. The generous enthusiasm was communicated from the sufferer to the spectators; and the blood of martyrs, according to a well-known observation, became the seed of the Church.

Increased
jealousy of
the Pagans,
A. D. 284—
303.

ALMOST in every city, the ancient churches had been found insufficient to contain the increasing number of the pro-

awaits them, which was afforded to the martyrs under their trials and sufferings, they would be unfitted for the concerns of this world, and their attention and affections would be entirely abstracted from it. At present, the mysterious rewards of a future life, while they invigorate and awaken faith and hope, do not so entirely engross the mind as totally to exclude objects of sense. E.

selytes

receive not the grace of God in vain. Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers

2 Cor. vi. 1.

COMMENTARY.

selytes to Christianity; and in their place more stately and capacious edifices were erected for the public worship of the faithful.—The zeal and rapid progress of the Christians awakened the polytheists from their supine indifference in the cause of those deities, whom custom and education had taught them to revere. The mutual provocations of a religious war, which had already continued above two hundred years, exasperated the animosities * of the contending parties. The Pagans were incensed at the rashness of a recent and obscure sect, which presumed to accuse their countrymen of error, and to devote their ancestors to eternal misery. The habits of justifying the popular mythology against the invectives of an implacable enemy, produced in their minds some sentiments of faith and reverence for a system which they had been accustomed to consider with the most careless levity.—At the same time, Maximian and Galerius entertained the most implacable aversion for the name and religion of the Christians. The minds of those princes had never been en-

* VOLTAIRE.—Pendant ces troubles (du tems de Galien) LE CHRISTIANISME s'établissait par degrés, surtout en Egypt, dans la Syrie, et sur les côtes de l'Asie Mineure. On laissait aux Juifs des grands privileges malgré

leurs revoltes: Mais les peuples s'élevèrent souvent dans les provinces contre les Chrêtiens. Les magistrats les persécutaient; et on obtint même souvent contre eux des edits emanés des empereurs. Du Siecle de Constantin.

lightened

2 Cor. vi. 1. of God ; in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings ; by

COMMENTARY.

lightened by science ; education had never softened their temper. They owed their greatness to their swords, and in their most elevated fortune, they still retained their superstitious prejudices of soldiers and peasants.

General persecution of the Christians by Dioclesian, A. D. 303.

AFTER the success of the Persian war had raised the hopes and the reputation of GALERIUS, he passed a winter with **DIOCLESIAN** in the palace of Nicomedia ; and the fate of Christianity became the object of their secret consultations. The pleasure of the emperors was at length signified to the Christians, who, during the course of this melancholy winter, had expected with anxiety the result of so many secret consultations. The twenty-third of February, which coincided with the Roman festival of the Terminalia, was appointed (whether from accident or design) to set bounds to the progress of Christianity. At the earliest dawn of day, the prætorian præfect, accompanied by several generals, tribunes, and officers of the revenue, repaired to the principal church of Nicomedia, which was situated on an eminence in the most populous and beautiful part of the city. The doors were instantly broke open ; they rushed into the sanctuary ; and as they searched in vain for some visible object of worship, they were obliged to content themselves with committing to the flames the volumes of holy scripture. The ministers of **Dioclesian** were followed by a numerous body of guards and pioneers,

pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report : as deceivers, and yet true ; as unknown, and

2 Cor. vi. 1.

COMMENTARY.

pioneers, who marched in order of battle, and were provided with all the instruments used in the destruction of fortified cities. By their incessant labour, a sacred edifice, which towered above the imperial palace, and had long excited the indignation and envy of the Gentiles, was in a few hours levelled with the ground.

THE next day the general edict of persecution was published ; and though Diocletian, still averse to the effusion of blood, had moderated the fury of Galerius, who proposed, that *every one refusing to offer sacrifice should immediately be burnt alive*, the penalties inflicted on the obstinacy of the CHRISTIANS might be deemed sufficiently rigorous and effectual. It was enacted that their churches, in all the provinces of the empire, should be demolished to their foundations ; and the punishment of *death* was denounced against *all* who should presume to hold any secret assemblies, for the purpose of religious worship. The PHILOSOPHERS, who now assumed the unworthy office of directing the blind zeal of persecution, had diligently studied the nature and genius of the Christian religion ; and as they were not ignorant that

Edict against
the Chris-
tians.

2 Cor. vi. 1. yet well known ; as dying, and behold we live ; as chastened, and not killed ; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich : as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Rev. vii. 9. AFTER this, I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kin-

COMMENTARY.

Its extreme severity.

the speculative doctrines of the faith were supposed to be contained in the writings of the Prophets, of the Evangelists, and of the Apostles, they most probably suggested the order, that the Bishops and Presbyters should deliver all their sacred books into the hands of the magistrates ; who were commanded, under the severest penalties, to burn them in a public and solemn manner. By the same edict, the property of the church was at once confiscated ; and the several parts of which it might consist, were either sold to the highest bidder, united to the imperial domain, bestowed on the cities and corporations, or granted to the solicitations of rapacious courtiers. After taking such effectual measures to abolish the worship, and to dissolve the government, of the Christians, it was thought necessary to subject to the most intolerable hardships the condition of those perverse individuals who should still reject the Pagan religion. Persons of a liberal birth were declared incapable of holding any honours or employments ; slaves were for ever deprived of the hopes of freedom, and the whole body of the people were put out of the protection of the law. The judges were authorized to hear and to determine every action

dreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the LAMB. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the

Rev. vii. 9.

COMMENTARY.

action that was brought against a Christian. But the Christians were not permitted to complain of any injury which they themselves had suffered; and thus they were exposed to the severity, while they were excluded from the benefits, of public justice.

THE fears of the emperor were at this time alarmed by the view of a danger from which he very narrowly escaped. The palace of Nicomedia, and even the bedchamber of Diocletian, were twice in flames.—Every mode of torture was put in practice; and the court, as well as the city, was polluted with many bloody executions. His resentment, or fears, at length transported him beyond any bounds of moderation, which he had hitherto preserved, and he declared, in a series of *cruel edicts*, his intention of *abolishing* the Christian name. By the first of these edicts, the governors of the provinces were directed to apprehend all persons of the ecclesiastical order; and the prisons destined for the vilest criminals, were soon filled with a multitude of bishops, presbyters, deacons, readers, and exorcists. By a second edict, the magistrates were commanded to employ every method of severity

Subsequent edicts against the Christians.

Spells
"Devilish"
in two
different ways

Rev. vii. 9.

elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever and ever. And one of the elders

COMMENTARY.

which might oblige them to return to the established worship of the gods. This rigorous order was extended, by a subsequent edict, to the whole body of Christians, who were exposed to a violent and general persecution *. Instead of those salutary restraints, which had required the direct and solemn testimony of an accuser, it became the *duty* as well as the *interest* of the imperial officers, to *discover*, to *pursue*, and to *torment*, the most obnoxious among the faithful. Heavy penalties were denounced against all who should presume to save a proscribed sectary from the just indignation of the gods, and of the emperors. The rigorous edicts of Diocletian were strictly and cheerfully executed by his associate Maximian, who had long hated the Christians, and who delighted in acts of blood and violence. In the autumn of the first year of the persecution, the two emperors met at Rome to celebrate

* VOLTAIRE.—Tant de vrais martyrs ont scellé l'Evangile de leur sang, qu'on ne doit point faire partager leur gloire à ceux qui n'ont pas partagé leurs souffrances. Il est certain que

DIOCLETIAN, les deux dernières années de son empire, et GALERIUS, quelques années encore après, persécutèrent *violemment* les Chrétiens de l'Asie Mineure, et des contrées voisines. *Vraies et Fausses Persecutions.*

their

answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made

Rev. vii. 9.

COMMENTARY.

their triumph; several oppressive laws appear to have issued from their secret consultations, and the diligence of the magistrates was animated by the presence of their sovereigns.

By the victory of Constantine over Licinius, the Roman world was again united under the authority of one emperor, thirty-seven years after Diocletian had divided his power and provinces with his associate Maximian. In considering this period, we may safely appeal to the original epistle which CONSTANTINE addressed to the followers of the Pagan religion, at a time when he no longer disguised his conversion, nor dreaded the rivals of his throne. He invites and exhorts, in the most pressing terms, the subjects of the Roman empire, to imitate the example of their master; but he declares that those, who still refuse to open their eyes to the celestial light, may freely enjoy their temples, and their fancied gods. A report, that the ceremonies of paganism were suppressed, is formally contradicted by the emperor himself; who wisely assigns, as the principle of his moderation, the invincible force of habit, of prejudice, and of superstition. Without violating the sanctity of his promise, without alarming the fears of the Pagans, he advanced, by slow and cautious steps,

Christian spirit of toleration under Constantine.

to

Rev. vii. 9.

them white in the blood of the LAMB. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither

COMMENTARY.

to undermine the irregular and decayed fabric of polytheism. —After the example of the wisest of his predecessors, he condemned, under the most rigorous penalties, the occult and impious arts of divination ; which excited the vain hopes, and sometimes the criminal attempts, of those who were discontented with their present condition. An ignominious silence was imposed on the oracles, which had been publicly convicted of fraud and falsehood ; the effeminate priests of the Nile were abolished ; and Constantine discharged the duties of a Roman censor, when he gave orders for the demolition of several temples of Phœnicia, in which every mode of prostitution was practised in the face of day, and to the honour of Venus.

Persecution
of the Chris-
tians under
Julian, A. D.
362.

IN the thirty-second year of his age, JULIAN acquired the undisputed possession of the Roman empire. The CHRISTIANS, who beheld with horror and indignation, his apostacy, had much more to fear from his power, than from his arguments. The PAGANS, who were conscious of his fervent zeal, expected, perhaps with impatience, that the flames of persecution should be immediately kindled.—Under the administration of their enemies, the Christians had

shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the LAMB which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them; and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Rev. vii. 9.

COMMENTARY.

had much to suffer, and more to apprehend.—When the father of his country declares himself the leader of a faction, the licence of popular fury cannot easily be restrained, nor consistently punished. Julian, in a public composition, applauds the devotion and loyalty of the holy cities of Syria, whose pious inhabitants had destroyed at the first signal, the sepulchres of the Galileans; and faintly complains, that they had revenged the injuries of the gods with less moderation than he should have recommended. This imperfect and reluctant confession may appear to confirm the ecclesiastical narratives; that in the cities of Gaza, Ascalon, Cæsarea, Heliopolis, &c. the Pagans abused, without prudence or remorse, the moment of their prosperity; that the unhappy objects of their cruelty were released from torture only by death; that, as their mangled bodies were dragged through the streets, they were pierced (such was the universal rage) by the spits of cooks, and the distaffs of enraged women; and that the entrails of Christian priests and virgins, after they had been tasted by those bloody fanatics, were mixed with barley, and contemptuously thrown to the unclean animals of the city.

CHAP. V.

Of the Jews, and their Dispersion.

Gen. xii. 1.

NOW THE LORD had said unto *Abraham*, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless

COMMENTARY.

Exclusive
zeal of the
Jews.

WE have already described the religious harmony of the ancient world, and the facility with which the most distant and even hostile nations embraced, or at least respected, each other's superstition. A single people refused to join in the common intercourse of mankind. The Jews, who, under the Assyrian and Persian monarchies, had languished for many ages the *most despised* portion of their slaves *, emerged from obscurity under the successors of Alexander; and as

* TACITUS.—Magna pars Judææ rios penes Medosque et Persas oriens vicis dispergitur. Habent et oppida. fuit, DISPECTISSIMA PARS SERVIENTUM. *Histor. lib. v.*

they

thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and *in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.* Gen. xii. 1.

AND when Abram was ninety years old and nine, Gen. xvii. 1. the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee; and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee,

COMMENTARY.

they multiplied to a surprising degree in the East, and afterwards in the West, they soon excited the curiosity and wonder of other nations. The obstinacy with which they maintained their peculiar rites and manners, seemed to mark them out a distinct species of men, who boldly professed, or who faintly disguised, their hatred to the rest of human kind. Neither the violence of Antiochus, nor the arts of Herod, nor the example of the circumjacent nations, could ever persuade the Jews to associate with the institutions of Moses the *elegant mythology* * of the Greeks. According to the maxims of universal toleration, the Romans protected a superstition which they despised. The *polite* Augustus condescended to give orders, that sacrifices should be offered for his prosperity

Their aversion to idolatry.

* FOR Mr. Gibbon's account of this *elegant mythology*,—of its *dark uncertainty* as to futurity, and of its *inefficacy* as to the production of moral virtue in the present life,—the reader is referred to the second chapter of this Historical View.

Gen. xvii. 1.

and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called *Abram*, but thy name shall be called *Abraham*; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

COMMENTARY.

in the temple of Jerusalem; while the meanest of the posterity of Abraham, who should have paid the same homage to the Jupiter of the Capitol, would have been an object of abhorrence to himself and to his brethren. But the moderation of the conquerors was insufficient to appease the jealous prejudices of their subjects, who were alarmed and scandalized at the ensigns of paganism, which necessarily introduced themselves into a Roman province. The mad attempt of Caligula to place his own statue in the temple of Jerusalem, was defeated by the unanimous resolution of a people, who dreaded death much less than such an idolatrous profanation. Their attachment to the law of Moses was equal to their detestation of foreign religions; and the current of zeal and devotion, as it was contracted into a narrow channel, ran with the strength, and sometimes with the fury, of a torrent.

Their extraordinary history.

THE contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you, and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised.---And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all

Gen. xvii. 1.

COMMENTARY.

careless indifference the most amazing miracles. Under the pressure of every calamity, the belief of those miracles has preserved the Jews of a later period from the universal contagion of idolatry *; and in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that *singular people* seems to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses. Even in their fallen state, the Jews, still asserting their lofty and exclusive privileges, shunned, instead of courting, the society of strangers. They still insisted with inflexible rigour, on those parts of the law which it was in their

* TACITUS.—Judæi MENTE SOLA, que mutabile, neque interiturum. Igitur nullum NUMEN intelligunt. Profanatur nulla simulacra urbibus suis, nedum templis sunt. Non regibus hæc adulatio, non Cæsaribus honor. *Histor. lib. v.*

Gen. xvii. 1. that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the self same day, as God had said unto him. And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

COMMENTARY.

power to practise. Their peculiar distinctions of days, of meats, and a variety of trivial though burdensome observances, were so many objects of disgust and aversion for the other nations, to whose habits and prejudices they were diametrically opposite. The painful and even dangerous rite of circumcision was alone capable of repelling a willing proselyte from the door of the synagogue.

The siege of
Jerusalem.
A. D. 70.

TITUS was adored by the eastern legions, which, under his command, achieved the conquest of Judea.—For the fulfilment of the predictions concerning the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish people, the most unexceptionable reference may be made to the testimony of JOSEPHUS;—a Jew, of the race of the Jewish priests, and of the first course of the Four-and-twenty; by his mother descended from the *Asmonean family*, which for a considerable time had the supreme government of the Jewish nation. He was with Titus during the whole of the siege of Jerusalem. The following extract

AND when JESUS was come near, he beheld the city, and *wept* over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which

Luke xix. 41!

COMMENTARY.

is taken from his account of the circumstances which attended this extraordinary event.—

‘IT is impossible to enumerate every instance of the iniquity of those men: but, in a word, never did any city suffer so great calamities as Jerusalem, nor was there ever, from the beginning of the world, any time *more fruitful of wickedness* than that *. These were the men, who overthrew the city, and compelled the Romans unwillingly to gain a disagreeable victory. They did little less than throw fire upon the temple, and seemed to think it came too slowly.

Wickedness
of the Jews.

‘MANY came out of the city to seek for food, or with a view of making an escape, who were apprehended by the Romans, and *crucified* before the walls; and many of them were *scourged* before they were crucified. This seemed to Titus very grievous; for five hundred Jews were taken in a day, and sometimes more; nevertheless he allowed of it. To dismiss them, and let them go off, would not have been safe; nor could he spare men enough to keep guard upon so many. Moreover he hoped that the sight of these miserable objects might dispose them in the city to think of

Many of the
Jews cruci-
fied.

* THIS, with the account which follows, of the siege and taking of Jerusalem, appears to be a translation from Josephus. E.

‘surrendering.

Luke xix. 41. belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall *cast a trench about thee, and com-*

COMMENTARY.

surrendering. The soldiers, out of anger, and hatred of the Jews, hung them upon the crosses, some one way some another, as it were in jest; and so great was the number, that room was wanting for crosses, and crosses were wanting for bodies.

Famine and
misery.

THE famine now increasing, it devoured whole houses. For a while, they who had no relations to take care of them, were buried at the public expence: afterwards the dead were thrown over the wall, into the ditch. When Titus, in going his rounds near the vallies below the walls, saw the dead bodies, and the putrefaction issuing from them, he fetched a deep sigh; and, lifting up his hands to heaven, called God to witness, that this was not his doing.—Many did still find means to get out of the city: some leaped down from the wall, others went out of the city with stones in their hands, as if they were going to fight with the Romans: but most of them died miserably. Some perished by excessive eating upon empty stomachs. Moreover some of them had swallowed gold, and were detected afterwards in searching for it in their excrements. This having been observed in a few instances, excited the avarice of the soldiers, who concluded that all the deserters were full of gold; they therefore cut up their bellies, and searched their entrails. In this way there perished two thousand in one night.

pass thee round, and keep thee in on every side. And shall lay thee even with the ground; and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one

Luke xix. 41.

COMMENTARY.

‘ night. Nor does it seem that any misery befel the Jews
 ‘ more terrible than this. When Titus heard of it, he was
 ‘ greatly displeased; especially when he found that not only
 ‘ the Syrians and Arabians had practised this cruelty, but the
 ‘ Romans likewise: he therefore gave orders that all who for
 ‘ the future acted in that manner, should be put to death.
 ‘ But the love of money prevailed against the dread of punish-
 ‘ ment;—and indeed it was God who had condemned the
 ‘ whole nation, and defeated every method taken for their
 ‘ preservation.

‘ But why do I stay to relate particularly these several
 ‘ calamities? for at this time Mannaëus, son of Lazarus, fled
 ‘ out of the city, and came to Titus; and told him that
 ‘ through the one gate, which had been intrusted to his care,
 ‘ there had been carried no fewer than one hundred and
 ‘ fifteen thousand eight hundred and eighty dead bodies, from
 ‘ the day that the Romans encamped near the city, the four-
 ‘ teenth day of the month of April, to the first day of July.
 ‘ That was a prodigious number! The man was not a gover-
 ‘ nor at the gate, but he was appointed to pay the public
 ‘ allowance for carrying the bodies out, and therefore was
 ‘ obliged to number them. Others were buried by their rela-
 ‘ tions, though their burial was no other than to bring them
 ‘ and cast them out of the city. After that man, there came

Great num-
bers de-
stroyed.

‘ to

Lukexix.41. stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

COMMENTARY.

‘ to Titus several other deserters of good condition, who told
 ‘ him that the whole number of the poor, who had been
 ‘ thrown out at the gates, was not less than six hundred thou-
 ‘ sand; the number of the rest could not be exactly known.
 ‘ They farther told him that, when they were no longer able
 ‘ to carry out the dead bodies of the poor, they laid them in
 ‘ heaps, in large houses, and then shut them up. They like-
 ‘ wise said that a measure of wheat had been sold for a talent:
 ‘ and that afterwards, when it had been impossible to come
 ‘ out to gather herbs, because the city was encompassed with
 ‘ a wall, some were driven to such distress, as to search the
 ‘ common sewers and old dunghills of cattle, and to eat the
 ‘ dung which they found there; and that what they could
 ‘ not before endure to see, they now made use of for food.
 ‘ When the Romans heard of these things, they commiserated
 ‘ their case: but the seditious, who saw them, did not repent
 ‘ till the same distress reached themselves; for they were
 ‘ blinded by that fate which was coming upon the city and
 ‘ themselves.

Conduct of
 Titus.

‘ TITUS was much affected with the present state of things,
 ‘ and reproached John and those with him; reminding them
 ‘ of the regard which had been shewn to the temple by the
 ‘ Romans, who had allowed them to erect in the courts of it
 ‘ a partition wall, with inscriptions in Greek, forbidding all
 ‘ foreigners to enter within those limits, and allowing them to
 ‘ kill

AND as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, HE said, As for Luke xxi. 5.

COMMENTARY.

‘ kill such as did so, though they were Romans. “ I call to witness,” says he, “ the gods of the country, and every god, who ever had a regard to this place (for I do not now suppose it to be regarded by any of them); I also call to witness my own army, and the Jews who are with me, and your own selves, that I do not compel you to pollute your sanctuary : and if you will change the place of combat, no Roman shall come near it ; for I will endeavour to preserve your temple, whether you will or not.”

‘ TITUS retired to the tower of Antonia, and resolved the next day early in the morning to storm the temple with his whole army, and to encamp about it. But certainly the Divine sentence had long since condemned it to the fire : and now the fatal day was come, according to the revolution of ages : it was the same day, and the same month, upon which it had been formerly burnt by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The temple was now on fire. Nevertheless Titus, still desirous to save it, if possible, came near and went into the sanctuary of the temple with his commanders, and saw it, with what was in it, which he found to be far superior to the accounts of strangers, and not inferior to the report of the Jews themselves. At the same time the treasury chambers were burnt, where there was an immense quantity of money, and a great number of garments and other precious things ; for there it was that the riches of the Jews were heaped up.

The temple
is burnt,

Luke xxi. 5. these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon an-

COMMENTARY.

‘ The soldiers also came to the rest of the cloister in the
 ‘ outer court, where there were women and children, and a
 ‘ mixed multitude of people, to the number of six thousand ;
 ‘ and before Cæsar had given any orders about it, the soldiers
 ‘ in a rage set fire to the cloister. Nor did any one of that
 ‘ multitude escape with life.

and the city
 plundered
 and burnt.

‘ At length, after great labour, and against a furious oppo-
 ‘ sition, the Romans became masters of the rest of the
 ‘ city, and set their ensigns upon the walls in triumph, and
 ‘ with great joy. They then plundered the houses, and killed
 ‘ every one whom they met with in the streets. They set fire
 ‘ to the city, and made the streets run with blood to such a
 ‘ degree, that the fire of many houses was quenched with
 ‘ men’s blood. However, it so happened that, when the
 ‘ slayers had left off in the evening, the fire greatly pre-
 ‘ vailed in the night. As all was burning, the eighth day of
 ‘ the month of September came on at Jerusalem ; a city which
 ‘ had suffered so many calamities during the siege, of which
 ‘ it was upon no account so deserving, as upon account of its
 ‘ producing such a generation of men as occasioned its over-
 ‘ throw.

‘ WHEN Titus was come into this upper city, he ad-
 ‘ mired some places of strength in it, and particularly
 ‘ those strong towers which the tyrants in their madness
 ‘ had relinquished. And he expressed himself in the follow-
 ‘ ing manner: “ We have certainly had God for our helper

“ in

other, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? Luke xxi. 5.

COMMENTARY.

“ in this war *. It is God who has ejected the Jews out of these fortifications. For what could the hands of men, or any machines do, towards throwing down such fortifications?” At which time he had many like discourses with his friends. He also set at liberty such as had been bound by the tyrants, and were still in the prisons. And when he entirely demolished the rest of the city, and overthrew its walls, he left those towers to be monuments of his fortune, which had fought with him, and had enabled him to take what otherwise would have been impregnable.

‘ THE soldiers were weary of killing. But there were many still alive. Titus therefore gave orders that none should be killed but such as were in arms, or made resistance, and to

Slaughter of
the Jews.

* To other prophecies respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, may be added that in Matt. x. 34, *erroneously* translated, “Think not that I am come to send peace upon EARTH; I came not to send peace, but a sword.”—This verse (on Mr. BRYANT’S authority) ought to have been translated thus: “Think not that I am come to send peace upon THIS LAND (*Judea*); I came not to send peace, but a sword.” That the word *γῆ* may bear that construction, will be evident

upon reference to the New Testament; where it is more frequently applied to Judea, or a particular district, than to the *whole earth*; and also by reference to the Septuagint, several examples of which Mr. Bryant (in his treatise upon the Authenticity of the Scriptures) has noticed:—that it *ought* to be so rendered *in this instance*, will appear by the context; the whole of this chapter having a reference to the apostles, and to the *age* and *country* in which they lived. E.

Luke xxi. 5. and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? And he said, Take heed that ye be not

COMMENTARY.

‘ take the rest captive. Nevertheless the soldiers slew the
 ‘ aged and the infirm: but for those who were in their flou-
 ‘ rishing age, and might be useful to them, they drove them
 ‘ together into the temple, and shut them up within the walls
 ‘ of the court of the women; over whom Titus set one of his
 ‘ freed men, and Fronto, one of his friends, who was to deter-
 ‘ mine the fate of each one according to his desert. Many
 ‘ were ordered to be slain. But of the young men he chose
 ‘ out the tallest, and the most beautiful, and reserved them
 ‘ for the triumph. Such as were above seventeen years of
 ‘ age, he bound, and sent them to work in the mines in
 ‘ Egypt. Titus also sent a great many into the provinces, as
 ‘ presents to them, that they might be destroyed in their
 ‘ theatres, either by the sword or by wild beasts. They who
 ‘ were under seventeen years of age were sold for slaves *.
 ‘ And during the time that Fronto was determining the fate
 ‘ of these men, there perished eleven thousand for want of
 ‘ food. Some of them had no food through the ill-will of
 ‘ those who guarded them. Others would not take what was
 ‘ given them. And indeed there were so many that there was
 ‘ not food for them.

* VOLTAIRE.—Vespasien et Titus firent ce siege memorable, qui finit par la destruction de la ville de *Jerusalem*. Joseph pretend que dans cette courte guerre il y eut plus d’un million de

Juifs massacrés. Ce qui resta, fut exposé dans les marchés publiques, et chaque Juif fut vendu a-peu-pres au même prix que l’animal immonde dont ils n’osent manger. *Des Juifs.*

deceived : for many shall come in my name, saying, I am CHRIST ; and the time draweth near : go ye not

Luke xxi. 31.

COMMENTARY.

‘ THE number of those who were taken captive during the whole war was computed to be ninety and seven thousand : and the number of those who perished during the siege, eleven hundred thousand. The greater part of them were indeed of the same nation, but not inhabitants of the city. For they were come up from all the country to the festival of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut in by the army ; which occasioned so great a straitness that there came on a pestilential disorder, and then a famine, which was more severe. This great multitude was collected from other places. The whole nation was shut up as in a prison : and the Roman army encompassed the city when it was crowded with inhabitants. Accordingly, the multitude of those who perished therein exceeded all the destructions that men or God ever brought on the world. As many were hid in caverns, the Romans made searches after them. If any were found alive, they were presently slain. But beside them, they found there more than two thousand ; some killed by themselves, and by one another, and more destroyed by famine. The ill savour of the dead bodies was offensive : nevertheless, for the sake of gain, many of the soldiers ventured into the caverns, where was found much treasure. John and his brethren, who were with him in a cavern, wanted food. Now therefore he begged that the Romans would give him the right hand for security, which he had often rejected before. But Simon struggled hard with

Extended to the whole nation.

the

Luke xxi. 5.

therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of *wars* and *commotions*, be not terrified: for these things

COMMENTARY.

The whole
of the city
demolished.

‘ the distress he was in, till he was forced to surrender himself, as we shall relate hereafter. So he was reserved for the triumph, and to be then slain. John was condemned to perpetual imprisonment. The Romans then set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burnt them down, and demolished the walls to the foundation.—And now when no more were left to be slain, nor any more plunder remained for the soldiers, Cæsar gave orders that they should demolish the foundation of the whole city and temple, leaving only the forementioned towers Phasælus, Hippicus, and Mariamne, and so much of the wall as was of the west side of the city: that was spared in order to afford a camp for those who were to lie in garrison; but as for all the rest of the whole circumference of the city, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground *, by those who dug it up to the foundation, that there was nothing left to make those who came thither, believe it has ever been inhabited †.”

‘ THE

* TILLOTSON.—We have this matter related, not by a Christian (who might be suspected of partiality, and a design to have paralleled the event with our Saviour’s prediction), but by a Jew, both by nation and religion, who seems designedly to have avoided as much as possibly he could, the very mention of the Christian name, and all particulars relating to our SAVI-

OUR, though no historian was ever more punctual in other things. *Serm.* 186.

† Thus far is extracted from JOSEPHUS. What follows is a continuation of the commentary by Mr. GIBBON; the whole of which, (with some casual and trifling variations, and with the exception before stated,) has been inserted by him, in his *History of the Decline*

must first come to pass ; but the end is not by and by. Then said HE unto them, nation shall rise against

Luke xxi. 5.

COMMENTARY.

THE destruction of the temple and city had been accompanied and followed by every circumstance that could exasperate the minds of the conquerors, and authorise religious persecution by the most specious arguments of political justice and the public safety. From the reign of Nero to that of Antoninus Pius, the Jews had discovered a fierce impatience of the dominion of Rome, which repeatedly broke out in the most furious massacres and insurrections.—The numerous remains of that people, though they were still excluded from the precincts of Jerusalem, had been permitted to form and to maintain considerable establishments * both in Italy and in the

Peculiar spirit of the Jews.

Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. That in the first chapter is to be found in vol. 2 (8vo. ed. of 1802) pages 265, 358, 366, 368, and 371; in vol. 3, pages 244, and 278; in vol. 4, page 230; and in vol. 10, page 242. That in the second chapter of this Historical View, is given by Mr. GIBBON in vol. 1, pages 46, 50, 370, and 389; in vol. 2, pages 287, 294, and 354; in vol. 4, pages 81, 87, and 90; and in vol. 5, page 118. The part of the commentary in the third chapter, is to be found in vol. 2, pages 273, 284, 293, 315, 318, 341, and 345; in vol. 3, page 246; and in vol. 5, page 205. That in chapter 4, is placed by Mr. GIBBON in vol. 2, pages 381, 389,

392, 402, 420, 426, 428, 459, and 476; in vol. 3, page 405; and in vol. 4, page 124:—And lastly, the commentary of the fifth chapter will be found in Mr. GIBBON's second volume, pages 267, 270, and 278; and in the fourth volume, pages 97, 100, 108, and 108. E.

* ADDISON.—The Jews are looked upon by many to be as numerous at present as they were formerly in the land of Canaan.—They swarm over all the East, and are settled in the remotest parts of China: they are spread through most of the nations of Europe and Africa, and many families of them are established in the West Indies.—Their numbers, dispersion, and adher-

Luke xxi. 5. nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and great *earthquakes* shall be in divers places, and famines,

COMMENTARY.

the provinces, to acquire the freedom of Rome, to enjoy municipal honours, and to obtain at the same time an exemption from the burdensome and expensive offices of society. — New synagogues were frequently erected in the principal cities of the empire ; and the sabbaths, the fasts, and the festivals, which were either commanded by the Mosaic law, or enjoined by the traditions of the rabbis, were celebrated in the most solemn and public manner.

Julian endeavours to restore Paganism. A. D. 361.

At the time when JULIAN was labouring to restore and propagate the religion of the Heathens†, he embraced the extraordinary design of rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem. In a public epistle to the nation or community of the Jews, dispersed through the provinces, he pities their misfortunes, condemns their oppressors, praises their constancy ; declares himself their gracious protector, and expresses an earnest hope,

ence to their religion, have furnished every age, and every nation of the world with the strongest arguments for the Christian faith, not only as these very particulars are foretold of them, but as they themselves are the depositaries of these and all the other prophecies, which tend to their own confusion. Their number furnishes us with a sufficient cloud of witnesses, that attest the truth of the whole Bible. Their dispersion spreads these witnesses through all parts of the world. Their

adherence to their religion makes their testimony unquestionable. Had the whole body of Jews been converted to Christianity, we should certainly have thought all the prophecies of the Old Testament, that relate to the coming and history of our blessed Saviour, forged by Christians, and have looked upon them, with the prophecies of the sibyls, as made many years after the events they pretend to foretel. *Spectator*, 495.

† Vide ante, p. 64.

that

and pestilences; and fearful sights and *great signs* * Luke xxi. 5.
shall there be from heaven. And when ye shall

COMMENTARY.

that after his return from the Persian war, he may be permitted to pay his grateful vows to the Almighty in his holy city of Jerusalem. The condition of those unfortunate exiles † might

* TACITUS has taken notice of the wars, commotions, earthquakes, and signs, which preceded the period of the destruction of Jerusalem.

—“ATROX PRÆLIIS, discors SEDITIO—
“NIBUS, ipsâ etiam pace sævum.
“Quatuor principes ferro interempti.
“Tria BELLA civilia, plura extrema,
“ac plerumque permixta. Turbatum
“Illyricum, Galliæ nutantes, perdomita
“Britannia, et statim missa:
“coërtæ in nos Sarmatarum ac Suevorum
“gentes: nobilitatus cladibus mutuis
“Dacus. Jam vero Italia novis
“cladibus, vel post longam seculorum
“seriem repetitis, afflicta.
“HAUSTÆ AUT OBRUTÆ URBES. Fecundissima
“Campaniæ ora: et urbs, incendiis vastata.—
“Præter multiplices rerum humanarum casus,
“CÆLO TERRAQUE PRODIGIA, et fulminum
“monitus, et futurorum PRÆSAGIA,
“LÆTÆ, TRISTIA, AMBIGUA, MANIFESTA.”
Histor. lib. 1.—If the history and character of TACITUS had not been well known, it might have been

supposed that this had been the commentary of some zealous Christian on the ninth, tenth, and eleventh verses of the twenty-first chapter of St. Luke. E.

† BEN MORDECAI.—Is it possible that so much tenderness as is every where expressed through the sacred volume, towards our once happy nation, should on a sudden, and for no apparent cause, entirely desert us? And we should be thus cast off from His favour, as we now are, and subjected to such unspeakable ruin, as hath befallen the whole nation from the days of *Vespasian* and *Titus*? Such as never any other nation under the sun has undergone: and suffered in our sieges, and battles, by seditions, and famines, and pestilence, and captivity, and massacres, and dispersions.—Surely if some amazing act of wickedness has not been perpetrated by our whole nation, beyond what other nations have committed, our present state and condition, for so many ages, is unaccountable, and our scriptures incredible. In this

Luke xxi. 5. see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which

COMMENTARY

might have excited the compassion of a philosophic emperor; but they obtained the friendship of Julian, by their implacable hatred of the Christian name. The barren synagogue abhorred and envied the fecundity of the rebellious Church; the power of the Jews was not equal to their malice; but their gravest rabbis approved the private murder of an apostate; and their seditious clamours had often awakened the indolence of the pagan magistrates.—The Jewish patriarch, who was still permitted to exercise a precarious jurisdiction, held his residence at Tiberias; and the neighbouring cities of Palestine were filled with the remains of a people, who fondly adhered to the promised land. But the edict of Hadrian was renewed and enforced; and they viewed from afar the walls of the holy city, which were profaned in their eyes by the triumph of the cross, and the devotion of the Christians.

this dejected and forlorn state, sifted into all nations, and become the scorn of all mankind, there yet remains *one* hope.—If JESUS be indeed the VISIBLE JEHOVAH, and ANGEL of the COVENANT, whom our fathers, *by an act of the whole nation*, have slain, we want no further explanation how we have offended him, or in what manner we

may expect a deliverance from our evils. He will return to us also, in mercy and loving kindness, and will save us, if we turn to him with sorrow and repentance, as to the ANGEL of the COVENANT whom we delight in, and be obedient to his voice. *Fourth Letter.*

are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For

Luke xxi. 5.

COMMENTARY.

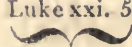
IN the midst of a rocky and barren country, the walls of Jerusalem inclosed the two mountains of Sion and Acra, within an oval figure of about three English miles. Towards the south, the upper town, and the fortress of David, were erected on the lofty ascent of Mount Sion: on the north side, the buildings of the lower town covered the spacious summit of Mount Acra; and a part of the hill, distinguished by the name of Moriah, and levelled by human industry, was crowned with the stately temple of the Jewish nation. After the final destruction of the temple, by the arms of Titus and Hadrian, *a plough-share was drawn over the consecrated ground*, as a sign of perpetual interdiction. Sion was deserted; and the vacant space of the lower city was filled with the public and private edifices of the ÆLIAN COLONY, which spread themselves over the adjacent hill of Calvary.

State of Jerusalem.

THE vain and ambitious mind of Julian might aspire to restore the ancient glory of Jerusalem *. As the Christians were

Julian attempts to rebuild the temple.

* ADDISON.—The great preparations which were made by Julian for rebuilding the temple, with the hurricane, earthquake, and eruptions of fire, that destroyed the work, and terrified those employed in the attempt from proceeding in it, are related by many historians of the same age, and the substance of the story testified both by pagan and Jewish writers, as *Ammianus Marcellinus* and *Zemath David*. The learned CHRYSOSTOM, in a sermon against the Jews, tells them this fact was then fresh in the memories even of their young men; that it happened but twenty years ago, and

 Luke xxi. 5. these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in

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were firmly persuaded that sentence had been pronounced against the whole fabric of the Mosaic law, the imperial sophist would have converted the success of his undertaking into a specious argument against the faith of prophecy, and the truth of revelation. The prospect of an immediate and important advantage would not suffer the impatient monarch to expect the remote and uncertain event of the Persian war. He resolved to erect, without delay, on the commanding eminence of Moriah, a stately temple, which might eclipse the splendour of the church of the resurrection on the adjacent hill of Calvary; to establish an order of priests, whose interested zeal would detect the arts, and resist the ambition, of their Christian rivals; and to invite a numerous colony of Jews, whose stern fanaticism would be always prepared to second, and even to anticipate, the hostile measures of the pagan government.

and that it was attested by all the inhabitants of JERUSALEM, where they might still see the marks of it in the rubbish of that work, from which the Jews desisted in so great a fright, and which even JULIAN had not the courage to carry on. This fact, which is in itself so miraculous and so indisputable, brought over many Jews to CHRISTIANITY; and shews us, that after our SAVIOUR's prophecy against

it, the temple could not be preserved *from the plough passing over it*, by all the care of Titus, who would fain have prevented its destruction; and that instead of being re-edified by Julian, all his endeavours towards it did but still more literally accomplish our Saviour's prediction, that *not one stone should be left upon another.* *Evidences,* sect. 8.

those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. *And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away* Luke xxi. 5.

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At the call of their great deliverer, the Jews, from all the provinces of the empire, assembled on the holy mountain of their fathers; and their insolent triumph alarmed and exasperated the Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem. The desire of rebuilding the temple has, in every age, been the ruling passion of the children of Israel. In this propitious moment the men forgot their avarice, and the women their delicacy; spades and pickaxes of silver were provided by the vanity of the rich, and the rubbish was transported in mantles of silk and purple. Every purse was opened in liberal contributions; every hand claimed a share in the pious labour; and the commands of a great monarch were executed by the enthusiasm of a whole people.

YET, on this occasion, the joint efforts of power and enthusiasm were unsuccessful*; and the ground of the Jewish temple, which is now covered by a Mahometan mosque, still continues to exhibit the same spectacle of ruin and desolation.

The enter-
prize is de-
feated.

* THIS FACT is unquestionable, that the EMPEROR JULIAN, possessed of the undivided power of the Roman empire, impelled by hatred to the Christian religion, and seconded by the enthusiastic zeal of the Jewish nation, earnestly attempted to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, and failed in

the attempt. The supernatural impediments which thwarted and at length put an end to Julian's attempt, are related by AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, an old *pagan* soldier, then personally attending upon Julian. If this historian had been converted by these extraordinary circumstances, the objec-

tion

Luke. xxi. 5. *captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* Verily I say unto you, *this gene-*

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tion.—An *earthquake*, a *whirlwind*, and a *fiery eruption*, which overturned and scattered the new foundations of the temple, are attested, with some variations, by contemporary and respectable evidence. This public event is described by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, in an epistle to the Emperor Theodosius, which must provoke the severe animadversion of the Jews; by the eloquent Chrysostom, who might appeal to the memory of the elder

tion to his evidence would have been of the same nature as the objection to the evidence of the *myriads* of persons, who were converted by the miracles performed at the first preaching of the Gospel;—that being *converts*, they were not *disinterested* witnesses. But as this rough old soldier was not converted by these miraculous events, the infidel's objection is—that if he had really believed what he wrote, he would have become a Christian. It is, however, to be observed, that he only relates simple facts, most probably entirely ignorant of the prophecies with which they were connected. E.

* THE EDITOR having now concluded the selection of his notes, from Authors some of whom have been

considered as hostile to revealed religion, may be asked whether, in adopting the evidence which has been given by them in favour of Christianity, he means to admit the authority of *all* that they have said or insinuated *against it*.

He answers, "No, BY NO MEANS.—

"WHERE PERSONS HAVE ATTEMPTED

"TO IMPOSE UPON THE WORLD, AND

"UPON CROSS EXAMINATION THEIR

"FALLACIES CAN BE DETECTED, THEIR

"TESTIMONY EXTORTED, AND TRUTH

"ESTABLISHED; the world may well

"admit such involuntary evidence, and

"receive the benefit of that truth,

"without being infested by any of the

"contradictory and abominable false-

"hoods, which they have endeavoured

"to propagate." E.

ration shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Hea- Luke xxi. 5.
 ven and earth shall pass away : but my words shall
 not pass away.

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part of his congregation at Antioch ; and by Gregory Nazianzen, who published his account of the miracle, before the expiration of the same year. The last of these writers has boldly declared, that this preternatural event was not disputed by the infidels ; and his assertion, strange as it may seem, is confirmed by the *unexceptionable* testimony of AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS. This philosophic soldier, who loved the virtues without adopting the prejudices of his master, has in his judicious and candid history of his own times, given the following account of the *extraordinary obstacles*, which interrupted the restoration of the temple of Jerusalem. “WHILST ALYPIUS, ASSISTED BY THE GOVERNOR
 “ OF THE PROVINCE, URGED, WITH VIGOUR AND DILI-
 “ GENCE, THE EXECUTION OF THE WORK, HORRIBLE BALLS
 “ OF FIRE BREAKING OUT NEAR THE FOUNDATIONS, WITH
 “ FREQUENT AND REITERATED ATTACKS, RENDERED THE
 “ PLACE, FROM TIME TO TIME, INACCESSIBLE TO THE
 “ SCORCHED AND BLASTED WORKMEN ; AND THE VICTO-
 “ RIOUS ELEMENT, CONTINUING IN THIS MANNER OBSTI-
 “ NATELY AND RESOLUTELY BENT, AS IT WERE, TO DRIVE
 “ THEM TO A DISTANCE, THE UNDERTAKING WAS ABAN-
 “ DONED.”

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